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HENRY SEIDEL CANBY

IN MEMORIAM  
Prof. A.F. Lange

















**COLLEGE SONS  
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Printed in the United States of America  
Published September, 1915

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## CONTENTS

	PAGE
PREFACE . . . . .	vii
THE UNDERGRADUATE . . . . .	1
THE UNDERGRADUATE BACKGROUND . . . . .	26
THE PROFESSOR . . . . .	48
THE LUXURY OF BEING EDUCATED . . . . .	71
COLLEGE LIFE AND COLLEGE EDUCATION . . . . .	97
CULTURE AND PREJUDICE . . . . .	118
THE COLLEGES AND MEDIOCRITY . . . . .	138
CURRENT LITERATURE AND THE COLLEGES . . . . .	159
WRITING ENGLISH . . . . .	184
TEACHING ENGLISH . . . . .	210





## PREFACE

FOR this book I have chosen the essay rather than the chapter as a unit of division, so that I might be able to discuss each of my topics as a subject important in itself. The ten essays here included proceed, I am emboldened to think, according to a development of experience and of thought that is coherent even if not severely logical. The first five treat of profit and loss in college life and college teaching; the last five of the broader problems that the American college must meet. But I have had no desire to mark out my field into sections, and cover them all. It is too extensive, too full of life and perplexity and happiness, to dogmatize and classify and divide and define within it. If I had been possessed of an elaborate pedagogical doctrine, I should have spent more time upon mapping the corners, and less upon trying to say truly what I have seen and what I think. Indeed, I am more interested in

## PREFACE

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college life, college students, and conditions as they are to-day in our colleges, than in any program or theory whatsoever.

As it happened, it was not the rage of the propagandist, but rather the creative working of happy memory, and sobering experience reacting upon thought, that led to the writing of this book. Hence he who so desires may read these essays as a literary, and I trust not unpleasant, transcript of experience, selecting his topic as he chooses his cigar, for the promise of its label. Or if his interest is more professional, he will find the principles that I have endeavored to draw from observation applied and reapplied to the problems of the American college.

I have written for undergraduates, present, past, and prospective, and for the parents of undergraduates. It is true that I have addressed these essays to college *sons* and college *fathers*. But they may be applied, I believe, doubtless with important modifications of detail, to college daughters and the mothers of college daughters as well. It is a sufficiently difficult task to describe even the sex one knows best, when it is involved in the obscure proc-

## PREFACE

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esses of getting educated. And so I have ventured to write for, but not of, the woman in our colleges.

I wish to acknowledge the courtesy of *Harper's Magazine* and *The Yale Review* in permitting the reprint in revised form of these essays; and to thank a hundred unnamed undergraduates for a personal relationship without which I would not have had the courage to pretend to whatever insight they may possess.

HENRY SEIDEL CANBY.

NEW HAVEN, CONNECTICUT,

*June 17, 1915.*



**COLLEGE SONS  
AND COLLEGE FATHERS**



## COLLEGE SONS AND COLLEGE FATHERS

### THE UNDERGRADUATE

**I**T was a somnolent afternoon in May. There was a grass-cutter on the college lawn outside, and a persistent oriole in the elms. We were on Browning; "Childe Roland to the Dark Tower Came" was the lesson. As the application to life and idealism became clear, the mystery of the poem began to stir the men before me. In spite of the drowsy noises and the warm sleepiness of the air, I could see interest awaken in their faces, and feel their minds stretch to take in the thought of the poet. When I reached "Dauntless the slug-horn to my lips I set, and blew. Childe Roland to the Dark Tower came," I could pause in a tense silence, and say, "That's all for to-day,"



## COLLEGE SONS AND COLLEGE FATHERS

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with quite a pleasant glow of successful achievement.

They picked up their hats and most of them scurried for the ball-game. But a row gathered in front of my desk. "What is my mark, please?" one asked, and jarred unpleasantly on my optimistic mood. "Am I going to be warned this month?" said another. "Are we going to have this in the examination?" a third pleaded. Then up stood, then out stepped, then in struck, amid all these, a fourth with a cold, hard-souled look to him. "What is there *practical* in all this literature, Professor?" he queried, obstinately; and might have added, "Your answer won't interest *me*."

I went into my office, and sat down to think it out. I remembered a phrase of my old teacher: "The astonishing power of the undergraduate mind to resist the intrusion of knowledge." I remembered the multitudinous articles, essays, letters, reports I had been reading on the failure of the colleges; the hail which (from papers they never read, and speeches they never hear) had been pouring on these boys; and, thinking not so much of the disappointment of this last attempt of mine as of other more serious dis-

## THE UNDERGRADUATE

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comfitures, I wondered if it were not all true. Then I began to take stock. And as I thought over my years in college and my years of teaching, and the misunderstandings and the blindnesses of them, and the charming boys I had known, and the wasted energies, and all the mistakes to be made in dealing with plastic but incalculable life, I found myself coming out at a door quite different from the one by which I had entered. I felt as great an impatience with the howl and outcry against the colleges and the undergraduate as with the storytellers who have been romanticizing college life until they have distorted it. The saying of gentle Traherne came into my mind, "Prize what you have," and I began to wonder if before we accept the growing condemnation of college life, and the failure of the college to educate, it would not be well to understand and to appreciate the undergraduate.

It is not an easy thing to do. On the one hand, there is sentimental fiction, which has cast a delusive glamour upon him. On the other, there is the business man who says he is untrained, the literary man who calls him illiterate, and the educator who asserts that he

## COLLEGE SONS AND COLLEGE FATHERS

is unwilling. There is his own personality, which is in a transition stage, and so doubly hard to comprehend. And there are his poses, many and various, which must be discounted before we can begin. Nevertheless, it is a dull observer who cannot be certain that three estimable virtues—courtesy, energy, and loyalty—flourish in the colleges.

The word "undergraduate"—in certain periodicals—has always an adjective linked to it, such as "uncouth," "boisterous," "noisy," "ill-mannered." We who live with him wonder why. Noisy and boisterous he is, but usually on highly proper occasions. He cheers at the theater instead of clapping; personally I like it; and the actors seem to like it, too. He improvises scratch quartets between lectures, and chants in the corridors. Why not! Uncouth he may be occasionally when, in the presence of his elders, especially the women, he remembers that, after all, he is little more than a boy, and stumbles over a chair or pronounces with difficulty. Ill-mannered he certainly is not. The old days, when tutors were stoned in their rooms and bulldogs set on the lecturers, have gone, at least in the colleges with which

## THE UNDERGRADUATE

---

I am familiar. Courtesy is as much a part of college custom as cleanliness; the politeness of one's class is a wall through which it is difficult to break. An insulting answer in a recitation-room is nearly as rare as a burst of tears. If a piece of chalk should hit me when my back was turned—and in the old days they did not stop with chalk—I should believe that it was an accident, and probably be right. It is true that courtesy is only a by-product of education, to use President Wilson's happy phrase. But there is more of it in the colleges than in the world outside.

Again, it is an old reproach against the college student that he is idle and lazy. Our present race of undergraduates are energetic beyond belief. Besides study—and, in spite of the current opinion, all of them do study—they are busy in a hundred directions. It was only recently that the faculty extorted an unwilling promise from the workers of the *Yale News* not to carry on their competition after midnight! Football, baseball, the crew, mean hours every day of hard labor (not fun, mind you) for half the year at least. Fraternity campaigning leaves the men exhausted in mind and

## COLLEGE SONS AND COLLEGE FATHERS

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body at the end of the "rushing season." The Y. M. C. A., business managerships for the many organizations, to say nothing of the hundred activities by means of which the needy support themselves, make college life a whirl of action, in which only the negligible and the despised hang back. You must make an appointment, as with a corporation president, if you wish to see a college leader out of recitation hours! That these efforts are well directed, that this is the ideal of academic leisure, I do not contend. But energy is certainly not a vice. No one—except the fat monks of the English monasteries—criticized the Northmen for their energy. And there is even more energy in our colleges than in American life.

But the great and shining virtue of the undergraduate is loyalty. At least one eminent philosopher thinks that in this word the greater virtues are summed. However that may be, wherever college life is sounded, in athletics, in friendship, in devotion to the college, in many regions less obvious, it seems to be compacted of loyalties. This it is, I believe, that makes our boys seem more earnest, while less serious, than the English student; that makes

## THE UNDERGRADUATE

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them seem naïve in contrast with older men who have lived in a world where ends are followed less blindly. The difference is not to their discredit. Once there came into my class of good-natured, immature sophomores, a Russian who had taken part in the revolution, and escaped with just his life and his revolutionary ardor. At first the contrast between this desperate idealist, who knew how to use weapons, manage men, risk lives for a cause, and these well-fed youngsters who had never conceived of any social order but their own, was almost ludicrous. When he spoke in his quick, sharp voice, they squirmed uneasily in their seats. It seemed unfair that ideas (for he had them) should assail them on their unprotected rear! But as I thought the contrast over, the difference lessened. Their blind loyalty to one another, to their captains, to their college and its spirit, differed, after all, only in object and in maturity from his; in its way was just as fine.

I do not mean that the loyalty of the undergraduate appears in the form of emotion or sentimentality. Talk about "the dear old college" and "my old chum" has been given

## COLLEGE SONS AND COLLEGE FATHERS

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the expressive epithet "rah rah," and laughed out of the vocabulary—at least in the more sophisticated institutions. The undergraduate, indeed, has become a man of the world. He hides his feelings except at the football-games; his talk is, half of it, badinage; and he is wonderfully successful at seeming to take life with no seriousness whatsoever. Furthermore, there are the cynics, and the prematurely mature, who wonder very rightly, like a character in a recent college novel, whether the college isn't there to serve them, and not they the college.

Nevertheless, this subterranean loyalty flows under the whole college structure, and wells up in the most surprising persons and places. To act against the "spirit" of the place is the unpardonable sin. "He has a pretty poor spirit" is the current anathema. Not to come out for a team, or an editorial board, or a musical club, if one has the ability, is damning—and almost incomprehensible. To be snobbish is to be unpopular—not on moral grounds, but because it hurts the tradition of democracy (democracy means "being civil to one's classmates") which every American college believes that it alone conserves. To be lazy, to be over-

## THE UNDERGRADUATE

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studious, to be dissolute, to be spendthrift, all offend in some subtle or obvious fashion the spirit of loyalty. Loyalty unites itself in the subconsciousness with the desire for social honors—the Mammon of our colleges—and is an inextricable part of the motives of those whose chief ambition is to make this society or that. It accounts for much of the strength of college friendships. It is a powerful lever to pry a man up in the world after graduation, and many among us have been kept moving ahead by the old college feeling that one must be loyal to the expectations of one's friends. In stories of broken-ribbed quarter-backs and water-logged crews the thing has been sentimentalized until it is hard to make it appear the simple fact of college life and the all-pervading force that it is. But however we may dislike some of the results, or deplore some of the ends and ideals of college loyalty, it is folly and destruction to attack it, or depreciate in the least degree its remarkable value for American life. The energy and the loyalty of the undergraduate are like the waters of a mountain stream. Running wild, they are wasteful and dangerous, though, to complete the figure, highly pic-



## COLLEGE SONS AND COLLEGE FATHERS

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turesque. Dry them up, or fight them back, and you do no good to any one; harness or direct them, and you will have a tremendous power at your command.

But how? I am not so rash as to attempt a final answer to that question. I am content at this point to maintain that until we prize what we have it is useless to criticize the undergraduate. And I hope to make clear that even then we must carry our criticism beyond an analysis of faults.

These are said to be many and black. To begin with, it must be admitted, even by those who are most in sympathy with him, that much of the undergraduate's energy is undeniably wasted. I say "much" advisedly, for it is mere pedagogy to suppose that all effort not directed toward intellectual development is wasted. Nevertheless, far too much of this college energy is burned as incense for the lesser gods. Interpret education as broadly as you will, even then it is difficult to reconcile a mad endeavor to do something and be something in the estimation of the little college community with any true function of the college. It is the approval of their classmates that our under-

## THE UNDERGRADUATE

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graduates seek, the approval and the material reward of approval: an election to a society, which means in this college world comfortable self-respect and an assured position, and in the next, the outer world, valuable friendships, useful connections that one does not have to wait for graduation to appreciate. Not that this approval is undesirable. You wish it for your son—and no one can blame you. But a student body that seeks social recognition as an end is likely to be somewhat uncritical of the activities that public opinion approves. It is hard enough to fulfil the requirements for success, without the added labor of estimating their value. It is much easier to plunge along blindly, do what is expected of you, and drown your critical faculties in busyness, than to reason out the true serviceableness of your efforts to the college or yourself.

They waste much of their energy, these undergraduates, because their range of sympathies, of interests, of ambitions, is too narrow. No one expects a boy of seventeen, just entering college, to be especially broad-minded; but though the vision of the Freshman and the Sophomore and the Junior grows clearer and

## COLLEGE SONS AND COLLEGE FATHERS

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truer, it broadens very slowly, and sometimes not at all. This last statement would be ludicrously untrue of individuals. Of the majority of college students it is true. They are narrow in their sympathies; and under existing conditions this is also not unnatural. Who expects the average youth of, say, twenty to be thoroughly sympathetic with art, literature, music, research; or with economics, politics, and the principles of finance; more especially when all these activities have scarcely touched him at home? As a thoughtful senior once said: "In summer, when I go home, it seems as if no one outside cared about the things you try to interest us in here." Fortunately we are on the eve of a "growing-up" of our student body. A great and important change has begun in our universities in the past ten years. One's classes "feel" differently. They respond, however irregularly, to the intellectual, the scientific, the esthetic appeal. The symphony concerts, the good plays, the "outside lectures" have a larger and larger following. In the Elizabethan Club recently founded at Yale, where for the first time (there at least) graduates and undergraduates meet upon an

## THE UNDERGRADUATE

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equal basis of club membership, the talk is various and good; and the best talk, I think, comes from the boys. The undergraduate's vision is narrow, but it is narrow because his sympathies are too often dormant—and the fault is not his.

It is their ideals of which, with more justice, one complains—their ideals which the very blindness of their loyalty prevents them from estimating truly. I was present not long ago at a class meeting where certain leaders were urging the men to get out and do something worthy of their class. An eager youth jumped to his feet, ran his hands through his hair, and burst forth: "Look here, you fellows, there's the Y. M. C. A. That's a college activity. You ought to go to the meetings. You fellows that aren't out for the teams or the musical clubs ought to see whether you can't do something *there*. It's a good thing, anyhow, and religious and all that; but what I'm saying is that it's a college activity and ought to be supported. Where's your spirit, anyhow!" As I listened, I saw in imagination the spirit of the elder Dwight recoiling in horror from this profanity; of the reverend president Ezra

## COLLEGE SONS AND COLLEGE FATHERS

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Stiles, calling for a sign from Heaven to proclaim the blasphemer preordained to damnation. But it was not blasphemy. My youth was speaking according to his lights. Supporting the college, *as he understood it*, was a duty beyond which he could not see.

It is scarcely necessary to point out the effect of this uncritical loyalty upon the undergraduate's attitude toward the curriculum. The results have often been described — although often with more vehemence than truth. Let me say, however, as emphatically as I can say it, that the current idea of the student who never studies, never is interested in his work, is nonsense. A very respectable quantity of honest studying is accomplished in our American colleges. The observers who think differently are often deceived by the fashionable pose which dictates that a man shall say to his fellow, "Don't know a thing about the lesson," no matter how hard he may have worked the night before. Neither in England nor in Germany (at least in the universities) are there so few men who get through with little or no study at all. As for quality, that is a different question. Intellectual broadening,

## THE UNDERGRADUATE

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mental training, culture, and all that a college in its strict sense is designed to achieve, get just the loyalty and enthusiasm to which their places among the various "college activities" entitle them. They have a place. Only the men who do not count neglect them. But they stand below the extra-curriculum activities. They are overshadowed by the lesser gods.

Again this applies to the mass only. Individuals, hundreds of them, do not come into the scope of this criticism. I could pick at a moment's notice groups of men from our best colleges to meet any objection—whether of educator, esthete, man of the world, scholar, or business man—which might be brought against college life and college education. Individuals, the student Dogberrys, whose ridiculous themes get into print, whose spellings are hawked about for the amusement of their elders, who write letters to the papers and sign themselves, "Yours respectively," do not enter into it. They are exceptions. They are the product not of the college, but of defective schools, or, more frequently, defective homes. Nevertheless, the immature, the dangerously

## COLLEGE SONS AND COLLEGE FATHERS

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narrow ideals are there, and they strongly affect, if they do not make, the public opinion of the undergraduate world. You cannot blink them away, and they control and direct too much of the energy and too much of the loyalty in itself above praise.

Who is to blame? First and foremost, only in small part, the undergraduate. He is a creature of his environment, past and present. The faculty, then? In some measure, of course. Given a faculty of mighty teachers, men of intense personality, of real intellectual eminence, and we would send our false gods scurrying. They do retreat in every college before the attacks of this man or that who succeeds in making literature or economics as vital (and this is difficult) as baseball or a Senior society. But a faculty made up of such individuals would be like Cromwell's army—every man a potential general. It can't be done—especially at the price we are willing to pay for them. Furthermore, many a professor enlisted for peace, not for war; and when one considers what is expected from modern scholarship, who can blame him for disliking to spend all his energies in battle with those who do not care to learn?

## THE UNDERGRADUATE

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Let us not excuse the faculty, however, but rather hold them in reserve for another discussion.

Who else is to blame? The schools? Their problem is quite certainly the same as that of the colleges. We change the venue without settling the case, by calling them into question. The parents and the home? Here we seem to reach one terminal, at least. For what did you send your son to college? To be educated, of course. But, in all honesty, what is the meaning of college education for you? Were you not content to have him take a degree, without too close questioning as to how he took it? Were you not, on the other hand, *eager* that he should live to the full the much-vaunted "college life," achieving his part of popularity and social success? Be sure that your half-expressed desires will become guiding principles for him. He knows and fears two public opinions, his school's and yours. If, in your guidance, a little conventional talk about doing well in his studies (easily said and easily seen through) fails to hide a far greater desire that he shall "make a society" and be popular in his class, how in any justice can you



## COLLEGE SONS AND COLLEGE FATHERS

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complain if the intellectual influences of the college pass over him and do no more than wet his plumage? In your capacity of bank president or superintendent or lawyer, you ask for men who have been trained to think, who are mentally better and broader for their education. In your capacity of father, do you not send your boys to college with the well-understood agreement that they shall be straight, energetic, and socially successful (admirable aims in themselves), and the further understanding that they shall do nothing to prevent the faculty from educating them? But no one was ever educated by merely consenting to the operation! The will to believe may be an end in itself; the will to be educated is only the first step in the process.

I do not wish to seem sourly pedagogical, or opposed to the joy of living which should be in the blood of every man in college. Nor would I minimize the enduring pleasure of college life, which, though a sentimental glamour may have been thrown upon it by the limelight of romantic fiction, is certainly one of the most picturesque and most likable features of America to-day. If it came to a question

## THE UNDERGRADUATE

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between efficiency and happiness in college, I for one should hesitate. It is not a little thing to have felt the Falstaffian joy: "Gallants, lads, boys, hearts of gold, all the titles of good fellowship come to you! What, shall we be merry!" And it is not necessary to be Falstaff in order to possess it in college. But it does not come to such a question. There is no fear that intellectual interests will make joyless, sallow bookworms of our undergraduates. As a figure in argument, the "grind" has been overworked. He exists, of course, but his real activity is in the mind of the bluffer, the shirker of intellectual labor, who, imagining a soulless engine quite different from the mild and plodding original, shudders at what he has escaped. The fun in college life is in no danger of suppression. It is unsuppressible. One wonders if there might not be even a little more if the competition for teams and crews were less killing; if there were more time for the imagination to play. The successful men in college do not seem to be very happy. Most of them—especially the athletes—are overworked!

It is a concerted attempt by faculty and parents that we need. A model curriculum

## COLLEGE SONS AND COLLEGE FATHERS

will not do it. We have altered and systematized our curriculums, since the break-up of the old classical courses left chaos behind, until the efficiency should have increased fifty per cent. Teaching in nearly all subjects has had energy poured into it, until one expects every year to see some result commensurate with the expenditure of devotion, and in no satisfying way discovers one. In truth, we have to work harder at our teaching than in the days when students were eager to be taught—and that we have kept the colleges from going backward is at least not discreditable. But in so far as all this regards methods and systematization, it is just machinery, effective and laudable, but machinery. We have splendid devices for leading the horse to water—but he must wish to taste of the Pierian spring before we can make him drink.

It is upon the aims and the ideals of the boy that we must work. Send him to college believing that you believe in broadening the intellect, in training the mind, in deepening the appreciation of life, and it will be relatively easy (for no healthy animal likes the preliminary stages) to educate him. If you want educa-

## THE UNDERGRADUATE

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tion from the colleges, see to it that your boys respect the fruits of education when they arrive.

And yet it is unjust to fall into the scolding vein and charge fathers and mothers with conditions for which they are only partly responsible. The final explanation of our difficulty is to be found in the peculiar social and intellectual circumstances of American life in this generation; and this is at the same time the most encouraging and the most discouraging feature of the situation. No need to repeat at length what has often been said. Bred of democracy, fostered by the best in our national ambitions, a passionate desire to educate every one, first built up our school system and then burst upon the colleges. This was good; but it has been followed and accompanied by an equally passionate desire on the part of a prosperous generation to set the mark of gentility upon its sons. And the easiest, because the best recognized way, has been to send them to college. To criticize the desire is to criticize the American plan. But when—as so often—it has been blind; when the college has been regarded as a finishing-school, and the nature of the desired finish determined

## COLLEGE SONS AND COLLEGE FATHERS

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upon grounds in which real intellectual training and true culture have had small part, then the results are what I have been trying to outline in the previous paragraphs. It is an error not unlike that of the undergraduate: an admirable ambition, prompted by loyalty to the American spirit, backed by praiseworthy energy, directed toward a goal over which our educational leaders shake their heads.

Well, it is not so black a business as the excited rhetoric into which a teacher naturally falls (and here apologizes for) would make it appear. God's in His heaven, a great deal of excellent education is squeezing somehow or other into the pores of an awe-inspiring number of fine young fellows. If it were not that the days of easy success were passing; if it were not that the English, the French, and the German competition was beginning to mean something; if it were not that we Americans, having made our country, are finding that we do not yet know how to live in it, why, then there would be little sense in all this sound and fury. But all these things are true, and soon will be pressing.

What is the remedy? In principle, it is very

## THE UNDERGRADUATE

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simple; in detail and practice, excessively difficult; and it is quite beyond my power or my purpose to turn it into a formula to fit the manifold conditions of our many colleges. Surely the remedy is to guide the current instead of fighting against it. Bergson has convinced many of us that the *élan vital*, the life-force, is far too subtle to be comprehended by the mathematical laws of science. And the boy *is* the *élan vital*! We must realize that these waves of misguided enthusiasm which beat through our colleges are part of the national life, and cannot be made to run backward. We must swing their energy toward some worthy purpose. It is a weary thing for the tired teacher to say, but to succeed we must intellectualize the business and scientific energy of the country (for it is just that which the undergraduate displays in his blind and immature fashion). We must intellectualize it as a century ago the colleges intellectualized the professional and theological energy. And we must teach the student how to live, not the life of Greece or Rome or Victorian England, but the life his time and his country allow him.

In comparison, it is relatively easy to make

## COLLEGE SONS AND COLLEGE FATHERS

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the undergraduate feel that the things of the mind are at least as interesting as the things of the body. But to do this we must have teachers of the first water; we must have, above all, the influences of the home back of us. We must have time and intelligent support. In the mean while—even though the Pharisees rage—do not be too severe upon our strenuous, lovable undergraduate. Do not minimize college life; rather help us to vitalize it.

Along toward the end of Senior year they begin to come out to see you, the boys that you have grown to know well and be fond of. And after a cigarette or two, and a preliminary skirmish on the prospects of the crew, or last summer in Switzerland, or some new book, out comes the real difficulty. They are nervous about next year. They feel hopelessly incapable, untrained, ignorant. The things they have learned to do well have lost their price. Of course they joke about it, and so do you, but the feeling is there underneath. It is then that you realize most keenly their mistakes and your own; then that you feel what a delicate mechanism a man is, and how difficult to throw into gear. And it is only when they

## THE UNDERGRADUATE

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are leaving, only when they begin to wake up to what will be required of them, that they reach the mood for education, the mood in which even we blundering professors could make education a success! This is what I regret.



## THE UNDERGRADUATE BACKGROUND

**I**T must have occurred to many to explore the background of the Freshman's mind, but in the midst of endless discussions of preparatory schools, entrance examinations, and all the vast and creaking machinery of American secondary education I find little mention of it. Perhaps the results have seemed too confused for publication. Perhaps—and this, as I sit and look at my Freshman class, I feel to be the true reason—a fear of the blank and empty stretches which may lie behind their agreeable faces, a dread of discovering just how little background the undergraduate does possess, has silenced the timorous pedagogue.

Occasionally I nerve myself to overcome this hesitancy, prepare for shocks and disillusionments, apply my probe, and proceed to reach the minds of that Freshman class, which squirms

## THE UNDERGRADUATE BACKGROUND

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and writhes as I proceed. They are not altogether discouraging, the results of that operation. I find much valuable and interesting material, even when I cannot discover the intellectual equipment that the college has specified. The youth who confuses Dogberry and doggerel has well-developed opinions on morality. He who describes the Puritans in terms of the Salvation Army is nevertheless a shrewd judge of human nature. And that quiet fellow in the corner, who belongs to a new and more intellectual America, names an opera or a symphony or a good book with a familiarity which makes me blush for the crude rawness of my own days as an American undergraduate. But he is only one, and well-nigh everywhere else I find a bleak ignorance—redeemed, sometimes, by shrewdness, persistence, and business ability, but very different from the sympathetic interest in knowledge and the arts which should be found in a boy who is ready to enter college.

When we declare, after examination in a number of definite subjects, that a boy is ready to enter our institution, and then are displeased with the result, it is this deficiency in background, I think—this poverty in intellectual

## COLLEGE SONS AND COLLEGE FATHERS

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interests—that makes the trouble. It is this that explains why so much effort is wasted in American colleges. Our teaching is strewn upon a bare and barren hinterland, where, finding no soil to root in, it dries up and blows away. And if a liberal education displays itself in so many college graduates as neither liberal nor an education, here is one cause that it is folly to neglect.

I never fully appreciated the importance of the Freshman's background until the exigencies of bachelor life lodged me for some years in the midst of a college dormitory. In those years I made what was, for me, a great discovery in undergraduate psychology. I learned that many a boy had gone through a long and expensive preparation for college with no perceptible effect on his intellectual interests; and this made me realize that a college course must possess and fructify those desert regions where the Freshman intellect pursues its nomadic way, or be a waste of time that might as profitably be spent at the "movies" or the ball-game. It was a discouraging conviction for a young and hard-worked teacher; but it was the truth.

## THE UNDERGRADUATE BACKGROUND

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There were a dozen or so of us living in a kind of prairie-dog settlement about a great central living-hall on which all our rooms opened. I was proctor, but under the influence of a common living-room the rigid barriers which separate the teacher and the taught weakened, and sometimes broke down. There were talks while we shaved, informal calls in dressing-gown or sweater, and (for better evidence) conversations outside my closed door, where the Freshman revealed himself to the reflective instructor with startling clarity. It was a highly differentiated gathering: West, East, South, and many schools had contributed to my family. One is a writer of rising distinction now, another a mining-engineer, a third a successful business man, a fourth (I should judge) one of the pillars of the Tenderloin. As their divergent careers indicate, they differed as much, one from another, as boys can differ, which is only a little less than men; and yet one statement could be made for nearly all: the sympathies, the prejudices, the knowledge they had gained at home or among their schoolmates, had little to do with the things they had learned at school. It was the first

## COLLEGE SONS AND COLLEGE FATHERS

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that made their background. It was there that they were living. The second—their formal training—was held in suspension, waiting, and often waiting vainly, to pass into the life processes.

The gulf between their thought and their so-called education showed itself only too clearly. Sometimes the talk would go on for hour after endless hour in trivialities of “prep-school” gossip, second-hand comment on college athletics, wearisome disputes as to who said this or who said that, in which no one was interested—without a suggestion of the new ideas that college was supposed to be giving them. But this was merely the reticence or the fatigue of active spirits. Often enough, if personality came into the discussion, or prejudice, or achievements that touched their imaginations, they would take fire; and when I talked with them alone, it was seldom that some vitality of interest did not reveal itself. But in ideas—esthetic, intellectual, commercial, for I tried them all—they were not interested.

It was in these talks that I came to understand the magnitude of the teacher's problem. Thanks to the narrowness of their interests,

## THE UNDERGRADUATE BACKGROUND

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the subject-matter of civilization—history, literature, science—was not at home in their minds. They received instruction as the Eskimo receives the arts of the white man—politely, but with some suspicion and not a little contempt. And yet, unless our teaching entered into and became a part of their backgrounds, it did not live beyond the cooling of the breath. I quickly discovered that the lesson which touched no chord of previous sympathy had to fight all the forces of youthful indifference, and speedily dropped away. I soon learned that a quickening appreciation was due as much to some old influence which time had welded into the brain as to the teacher who awoke it. And when there was nothing to work upon we worked in vain.

The banker's son from New York was clear-sighted and quick of comprehension, but he had lived his life amid ideals of profit and physical pleasure. The moral philosophy of English literature shed from his brain like water from a roof. The son of the Montana miner had a heart of gold and common sense worth millions, but he had come from an over-practical world which recognized the abstract only when

## COLLEGE SONS AND COLLEGE FATHERS

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it was sentimental. Thought about religion or atoms or politics or poetry passed through his head and left never a path behind it. And there was one youth, by no means the most intellectual, or even the most likable, who seemed to clinch the argument. He, it seemed, had lived in a family where food, business, reprimand, and complaint had not been the only topics of conversation. His mind was stored with vague interests in politics, science, art, vague ambitions toward knowing "why things were so," and how to control them; interests and ambitions worthless in themselves because of their very vagueness. He knew nothing definite, he could do nothing well, he had always been at the middle of his classes; he was, so he thought, and with justice, mediocre. Nevertheless, that boy was getting educated while the rest of them were merely being trained. From his position of inferiority he was advancing, and he advanced, abreast of and then beyond them. It may have been delayed ability. I do not think so. It was rather that, thanks to the sympathies which had been rooted in his mind, his thoughts were hospitable to education. I doubt whether he

## THE UNDERGRADUATE BACKGROUND

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has made as much money as the rest of them. He lacked shrewdness for that. But I know that he got more from his education; and I think that he is doing more with his life.

That boy had *background*—a background not so much of knowledge and experience, though all that he had was valuable, as of awakened intellectual desires. The others, with slight exceptions, had not. It did not make them less excellent fellows to know and to live with. It did not affect their common sense or their morality. But it did make them less interesting to talk to; for once outside a narrow range of athletics, travel, or mutual acquaintances, they did not react. And, oh, what a difference when it came to educating them! It was painful to know that, failing to reach the distant background where the boy was living, our ardor was flung away for trivial results. But at least it explained the many, many disappointments, and nerved one to assault more intelligently the well-guarded citadel where lurked the minds of the Freshman class.

I had been too recently an undergraduate myself to feel rancor. It seemed the established order that a boy should come to college keenly



## COLLEGE SONS AND COLLEGE FATHERS

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alive to its social possibilities, and indifferent to ideas and to culture. It seemed a notable triumph for the university when I considered how many men of my college generation had emerged with minds that were sweetened, made liberal, filled full of useful interests, and ready to discriminate among the values of life. I praise my university a little less now that, being part of her, I realize the things she did not, perhaps could not, do for us. But against the "established order" and its self-satisfied indifference I am in revolt.

Why should the universities have to take over from good schools and comfortable homes so much sodden clay into which only a new creation could put the breath of intellectual life? Why should they have to press their wares upon the unwilling student like patent-medicine venders? Is it fair, is it honest, is it wise to send them boys who might want education, yet do not; who might be interested in knowledge, yet are not; whose habit of mind is opposed to all cultivation not directly associated with elementary pleasure or dollars and cents? The critics say, If you gave them an education adapted to modern life they would

## THE UNDERGRADUATE BACKGROUND

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not be indifferent to it. Alas! if in the intellectual loafers among our undergraduates I could discover an interest in any kind of education, I should be more optimistic.

I am not complaining of the preparation of our undergraduates, in the strict, scholastic sense of the word. That is *our* problem. I freely admit that the schools might teach them more, and I know, of course, that better educational methods would enrich their backgrounds as well as increase their knowledge. Indeed, I see a dozen instances in my Freshman classes where this has been true, especially among boys who have been subjected to the superior discipline and richer education of a European school. The trouble fundamentally is not here—it is in the home. In the first of these essays I said, with as much restraint as the ruffled spirit of a weary teacher would permit, that the parents who sent their boys to college to “make a society” and become “good mixers” were unjust, then and afterward, to the boys and to the college. They are also chiefly to blame, these parents, for the weak and pallid background of the undergraduate. And it is in the home that children learn a bad philosophy of getting educated.

## COLLEGE SONS AND COLLEGE FATHERS

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To speak of a "philosophy of getting educated" in boys of seventeen is not so foolish as it sounds. The Freshmen, consciously or unconsciously, have a very definite attitude toward "learning things," and that attitude is their philosophy. Try them and you will quickly find that they have taken their stand already as regards "culture" and "mental discipline," just as they have taken their stand in moral matters. I do not refer to what they *say*. The undergraduates will maintain as one man that "culture" is desirable. The most flagrantly epicurean and wilfully Philistine members of my class will cheerfully assert in writing, and over their signatures, that from the bottom of their hearts they believe "a man ought to broaden his mind by studying a number of subjects" in college. And the laziest Senior, after an evening at a café or the "movies," will stroll over to the class polls next morning, humming "In this college life there is rest," and cheerfully vote that Phi Beta Kappa was what he most desired in college! I mean, of course, what they *feel*, as indicated by what they *do*. And it is not usually the school that makes the striking differences which appear—differences ranging

## THE UNDERGRADUATE BACKGROUND

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from a warm and fruitful appreciation to a dull and indifferent spirit. It is the philosophy which they drew from their background—which is to say, from their environment, and most of all from their homes.

American parents might echo the regretful words of King Lear, who had “ta’en too little care” of the social errors ripening before his unseeing eyes. Like “big business,” and the exploiters of our natural resources, they have allowed the period of excessive individualism now drawing to a close to lead them into serious errors of omission and commission. In the nineteenth century, religious education in the home, with the incidental culture that accompanied it, began to decline. Its place was taken by an almost superstitious faith in the power of the college and the school. Thousands of American parents who professed to desire cultivation for their sons and daughters, chose—through modesty or laziness—the method of *laissez-faire*, and shifted their responsibility upon formal education. The mother was busy learning the ways and means of the new luxury which in the '80's began to be obligatory for socially ambitious Americans; the father

## COLLEGE SONS AND COLLEGE FATHERS

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was still busier, earning the wherewithal for the process. Both, in many instances—I judge by results—gladly welcomed these insidious theories of individualism in education. Let us put the boy in a good school, they said, where of course he will become educated. Then, having spared no expense in the effort to give him the best in the market, they washed their hands of the whole affair, and, unless he was dropped or expelled, concerned themselves no more with the matter. The result is the college problem of to-day—a profusion of well-dressed, well-mannered boys, fairly well-trained, fairly well-stocked in mind, but devoid of any active interest whatever in their education.

The mistake was to suppose that a school alone could give them background. By what miracle of education could these children of parents indifferent to knowledge and scornful of culture be endowed in the schools with the thing that all their early environment had taught them to neglect or despise! It was too late. Instruction, like a thunder-storm above rocky summits, rumbled and burst upon their impervious heads, and only the mental habits of their boy companions, with minds as immature as their own,

## THE UNDERGRADUATE BACKGROUND

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really influenced their ways of thinking. Thus at school they lived in a barbarous age of their own and their friends' creating, where light, learning, and scientific truth were viewed much as the Crusaders, who stamped Greek bronzes into coin and burned marbles for lime, regarded the beauty and the civilization of ancient Constantinople. The *laissez-faire* method, as I have described it, may have increased self-confidence, favored manliness, and saved time and worry for the American parent, but as a cultural process it was thoroughly inefficient.

Well, what is to be done about it? Let us suppose that we desire culture, by which I mean no mere affectation of knowledge, nor any power of glib speech, or idle command of the fopperies of art and literature, but, rather, an intelligent interest in the possibilities of living. Indeed, there is no *raison d'être* for the college of liberal arts if there is no such desire. Well, what is to be done? Buy a library, redecorate the living-room, adopt the broad *a*, enter the whole family in the nearest summer school, and take the boys to "Götterdämmerung" instead of to the ball-game?

## COLLEGE SONS AND COLLEGE FATHERS

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Such a method of providing a background in a hurry has been tried, with results that our native playwrights have failed to grasp only because their fondness for melodrama has dulled their sense of humor.

And yet even a college professor can see remedies—partial, to be sure, yet remedies that will bring relief.

The first is to be honest. If you are content with an education for your children that gives a certain amount of superficial information, to be acquired while they are making friends, advancing socially, and preparing to come out of college “good mixers,” if not educated men and women, why, then, be honest about it, teach them to be honest, and do not deceive yourself or them into supposing that it is culture you are after, or culture that they have got. For some undergraduates this is the best, indeed it is the only course, though for most it is perdition. Some minds can absorb, and some will absorb, no more than a certain measure, even though deans and faculties and educational journals rage. Once they get into college, one must make the best of them. The college will suffer. But then education

## THE UNDERGRADUATE BACKGROUND

has always had to carry dead weight, and will continue to do so until some new economic order makes it necessary for every one to work for a living.

If the lazy-minded are honest, they are not dangerous — one learns to accept them, like humidity and flies. It is the men who are not honest that corrupt college life, the men who wish to turn college into a social institution and call that culture, or into an athletic competition and call that education, or into a mold of character or good manners, and call that intellectual training. If they were honest with themselves, if you were honest with them, they could not be so deluded. They would either frankly admit that their goal was not intellectual development, and so become less dangerous; or turn more of their admirable energies into training the mind, and so become really valuable; or stay away from college. I do not believe that many are the worse for their college course, since our undergraduate life has a wonderful vigor and sweetness, which enriches often where it does not educate. But such men can do incalculable harm to their colleges.



## COLLEGE SONS AND COLLEGE FATHERS

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Of course there are many fathers—especially among business men—who frankly do not believe in culture, and who are quite willing that their children should get the associations of college life with the modicum of cultivation which cannot be escaped. I have another and equally serious quarrel with them, which demands more space than this essay can afford. They at least are honest. Their prejudices are due to a well-grounded distrust of the intellectual fops and dry-as-dust pedants who will sometimes develop as excrescences upon the cultural process. Or, if not prejudice, it is a wilful ignorance of what the colleges mean by culture that misleads them, and a wilful blindness to the kind of intellect that will be required of the next generation. But my quarrel here is with the parents who profess to believe in college education.

If, being such a parent, you are not content with the ambiguous training desired by the advocate of “country-club colleges”; if you belong to the new generation which has begun to realize that the complexities and competitions of modern life are crying for intelligence to master them, and that even millions are

## THE UNDERGRADUATE BACKGROUND

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growing difficult to spend; if you demand a training for your children that will stir the inner virtues of the mind — why, then, two courses are open. Granted schools and colleges as good as one can provide—and they are not yet good enough for the splendid material that America is breeding—it is indispensable that there be, in addition, either background, with all it implies, or a heartfelt desire for education.

Now it should not be difficult to give the current Freshman a proper background. Colleges in America have spread with incredible rapidity. But they have spread no faster than homes where all the appliances of civilization are at hand. The background of culture, thanks largely to our women, is available in many, if not in most, families of moderate means. But, unfortunately, it is not yet our background. We are a little restive before it—suspicious of its refinements, contemptuous of its luxuries. It is like a new fashion, worn awkwardly, scornfully, by practical men, if worn at all. And the hearty young barbarians, who always imitate those they love best, magnify our suspicions, our contempts, and go off to school

## COLLEGE SONS AND COLLEGE FATHERS

and college with that for their intellectual and esthetic philosophy.

It is hard at middle age to broaden tastes, to become interested in thought, to learn to use as well as to possess the possibilities of living that a good income and the twentieth century put before us. And yet, if the children are to be given a fair start in the more intellectual period that is certainly coming, the effort must be contemplated. Unless they are strong enough to break away from their first environment—and many are not—school alone will never bring culture with it, nor will college.

The families who lack the apparatus and the atmosphere of fine living, whether through the hampering poverty of a tenement flat or the distracting riches of a new-made million, are handicapped, perhaps, but in no sense deprived of the opportunity to give education a fair chance. They may not be able to insure for their children a background rich in experience of the arts of life, but they can inculcate the desire for one; and in youth, desire is even better than possession. There may be bad pictures on the wall, cheap books on the shelves, narrow

## THE UNDERGRADUATE BACKGROUND

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talk or none at all at table, and yet the boy who emerges from such an environment may be surer of awakening his intellectual being than the son of an art-collector or a patron of symphony concerts—if he really wants to be educated. Neither poverty nor riches is the determining factor. In either case, the wish to know truly and to feel truly can be instilled, if there is the will to instil it. And such a longing wins against any odds.

In one respect, at least, the youth who must fight his way out of utter Philistinism, or the barren environment of the poor, is better off than he who enters college already acquainted with the liberal arts. He has rubbed, and rubbed hard, against the basic necessities of life—need of food, need of clothes, need of money—or at least his parents have made him familiar with those incorrigible realities which came before the arts and will stay after them. And the saving practicality that comes with hard-earned sustenance, and remains when the stress and the pinch are past, will save him from the poses, the potterings, and the fopperies that accompany culture too easily won, and make it—what all culture seems to many

## COLLEGE SONS AND COLLEGE FATHERS

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Americans—an ornament, rather than an aid to a richer and more purposeful life.

There is no getting round it. If we wish the colleges to instil culture, we must either become cultivated ourselves, or by some other means make our children desirous of culture. Even so, the problem will not be solved. Inefficient teachers will remain to be reckoned with, especially since we shall probably continue to refuse to give them enough income to keep what culture they possess at the boiling-point. And there are few schools and few colleges in which outworn, ineffective methods do not here and there hold back even the willing mind from a full measure of accomplishment. The sociologist will remark that there is also heredity. It is still true that you cannot make a silk purse out of a sow's ear, and as there are boys who would become educated in Greenland or Nigeria, so, as I have already admitted, there are others whose brains permit of only a moderate education, strive as we may. But the psychologists and anthropologists now give us reason to believe what common sense has long taught—that the power of environment, if not absolute, is at least greater than

## THE UNDERGRADUATE BACKGROUND

any other shaping influence upon the mind. Environment cannot make, though it may mar, genius or even talent; but a bad heredity will not prevent a boy in a favorable environment from acquiring an adequate education.

A far more serious problem is to determine just what true culture is going to be for the next generation, so that the bewildered parent may adequately prepare for it. Few will agree as to its probable nature, and in the particular forms of education and environment by which we try to instil it there is abundant room for legitimate differences of opinion. But no one will deny, I think, that a mind eager to get at the truth and willing to enjoy the best is a chief requisite in any conceivable educational program.

## THE PROFESSOR

**T**HE college professor as he appears in American novels and upon the American stage is so picturesque that I should like to forget the dangers of the caricature. He is presented as a mild individual, with vacant eyes, an absent mind, a long beard, and untidy clothes. This imagined professor wears loose slippers in his study, and looks through steel-rimmed glasses on a world which does not concern him. The passions touch him not, and in the presence of dollars and cents or other facts of existence he displays a touching helplessness which is charmingly humorous. He lives serene and untroubled among his books, dreams beautiful dreams, sees attractive but unprofitable visions, and economically and politically is supposed to rank with the women-folk, as intermediate between the real men and the paupers, feeble-minded, and Indians untaxed.

## THE PROFESSOR

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The average American knows that this slippered gentleman is a product of the genial imagination of our comedy-makers, and yet his own conception of the college professor is not much nearer the truth. He imagines him, if my observations are correct, as a dignified but severe individual with a trimmed beard, a cold eye, and a mysterious interest in subjects of no earthly use to anybody. He believes him to be indifferent to the necessities, and unsympathetic with the pleasures, of everyday existence. Although he respects his cultivation and is impressed by the extent of his knowledge, in his heart of hearts he still feels, in spite of recent instances to the contrary, that the professor is futile in active life, and therefore merely ornamental in our civilization.

The truth is that the average American knows very little about the college professor, and takes few pains to know more. My legal friend, who motors in and out from his country residence and has time for golf in the afternoon and the theater or reading every evening, talks to me enviously of the *otium cum dignitate* of life in the academic shades, and does not heed my ironic reply. The business man,



## COLLEGE SONS AND COLLEGE FATHERS

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who knows that I have three months a year free from college duties, assumes that it is all vacation, and smiles indulgently when I speak of my summer work. In discussions of affairs our comments are likely to be dismissed as impractical—undoubtedly they often are so—before they are heard, on the principle that governed the medievals when they distrusted in advance all that a lawyer might have to say of religion. And it is clear what the financial world thinks of us, since every wildcat enterprise sends its circulars to all the names on the college catalogue; strong evidence that it knows little about the college community, for few professors have a surplus worth stealing.

After all, the animal does not differ so much from the rest of the community; in fact, he is scarcely a different species. The modern professor is more usually a man of the world than a recluse. He knows good cigars, as well as good pictures and good books. He enjoys his club with a very human enjoyment. As a golfer or tennis-player he is often above the average. His talk, if a trifle dogmatic and inclined to stray from the cardinal American topics—business, athletics, auto-

## THE PROFESSOR

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mobiles, and anecdotes—is rarely pedantic, and far more intelligible than the dialect of the motorist or the jargon of baseball. If he wears unfashionable clothes, they more often indicate an unfortunate economic condition than a disregard of his neighbors, and when he holds back from social and municipal activities it is often for the same reason. If he is little skilled in commerce, at least he knows as much of the banker's, the lawyer's, or the manufacturer's business as they do of his; perhaps more. Prick him in his pride, his purse, his likings, or his intolerances, and he will bleed quite as if he were a financier or a politician. In short, he is human.

This being true, it is curious that he should be regarded as unsympathetic, as indifferent to the life about him. Indeed, if there is indifference, I believe that it is quite as much America's as the professor's. It is not pleasant to be held at arm's-length from life. It is irritating to meet constantly with the assumption that intellectual interests are alien to human nature. And the professor, not wisely, perhaps, but quite humanly, sometimes retaliates. The business man who patronizes or is

## COLLEGE SONS AND COLLEGE FATHERS

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indifferent to the world of thought, is too often held in contempt among academic coteries. I do not defend this attitude, especially when it rises to superciliousness; nevertheless, it is comprehensible. But the professor with whom I am most familiar seems to me to be almost pathetically interested in the details of practical life, as if anxious to confirm the theory it is his business to teach. And this is what one would expect as the result of his profession. The study of biology, or medieval history, or Shakespeare is quite as human as soap-making; teaching surely exercises the sympathies as much as managing a factory or selling land. In short, I am driven to the conclusion that the lack of harmony between the teacher and the parents of those he must teach begins more often without than within the colleges. Its dangers, its effects upon teaching, I shall touch upon later.

I fear there is little doubt that the average American regards the professor as ornamental, and in recognizing this fact I am not so resentful as afraid—afraid of the results. Why deny the fact? Reason instructs us that some one must teach our children, that knowledge must be accumulated, culture presented, thoughts set ger-

## THE PROFESSOR

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minating; but we continue to feel, nevertheless, that our professors are merely necessary conventions associated with the finishing-schools, called colleges, to which we send our boys for an experience which custom makes necessary, in the hope that they may learn what it is better for them to know, and emerge with the social position which they must possess. The place of the professor in this process is felt to be time-honored and eminently respectable. With the college songs, the college curriculum, and the college bills, he is part of the life which we are buying for our children. But we expect little more of him. If our youngsters express enthusiasm for his personality, his ideas, or his work, we are mildly uneasy, fearing the fanatic or the crank. I am trying to voice the sentiments of a typical American, which is to say a commercial, community; not, mind you, what they say, or what they think, but what they feel. Perhaps I am unjust, but I do not think so. I myself come from a business family and a business community.

The results might have been as disastrous for the college professor as an equivalent attitude has proved for certain branches of the

## COLLEGE SONS AND COLLEGE FATHERS

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clergy. The professor has been expected to be ornamental; it has sometimes been made clear that if he were content with a living wage he would be allowed—nay, encouraged—to continue in a merely ornamental capacity. Neither as scholar nor as teacher has he often succumbed to the temptation; he has usually been unaware of it; and this is due solely, I think, to the absorbing interest of modern scholarship, and still more to his artistic conscience—for teaching is an art.

Nevertheless, as critics of our colleges have numerously testified, the professor has not satisfied America. Nor will he until America takes his work more seriously. The business of the professor consists of teaching and research. Research will probably take care of itself. Its results are tangible—so tangible that even a commercial generation is beginning to approve them—and its fascination is great. Furthermore, since the products of successful research can be weighed and tested with little difficulty and without undue strain upon the judgment, college promotions have been most frequently made upon an estimate of research. A book published is clear evi-

## THE PROFESSOR

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dence for or against a candidate. But good teaching is elusive, subject to false testimony, slow in its effects, hard to estimate, requiring time and trouble to search out. Hence it is important that the outside world should endeavor to encourage the teacher, should demand much of him, and pay him in appreciation for what it gets. Hence if it thinks the teacher merely ornamental, it strikes a blow at him and itself.

Even under circumstances that might dampen enthusiasm, ardent, eager teaching has certainly not slackened in our colleges. It takes more than indifference to curb an art. When I first began to teach, I found myself one of a group of youngsters, all novices and all enthusiasts. Some of us had consciously aimed from the beginning at the academic life; some of us had drifted into it, lured by its opportunities or repelled by the impossibility of doing elsewhere the things that interested us. But all were united by a common resolve. We had come under good teachers in school and college. But we had also come under bad teachers. And we were resolved that if we could not get results from our work—once we

## COLLEGE SONS AND COLLEGE FATHERS

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had mastered it—if we could not keep vivid, alive, and awake in the lecture chair—we would give up the profession and go into what those who have never taught call “the active life.” I suppose that we are all a little disillusioned by now. I suppose all of us are uncertain, as at the beginning, of how much we can teach; that all of us are aware that the results of teaching must often be seen by the eyes of faith. But none of us have thrown up our profession and gone into the world; none of us have wished to do so. The art of teaching is too absorbing.

My friends outside the college gates say to me, “How monotonous it must be to teach the same thing over and over!” Nonsense! You never teach the same thing twice; how can you, when each time it must be fitted to different minds? They say, “How tiresome to be always shouting at unwilling ears!” Tiresome! The more unwilling, the more adventurous is the effort. And even the cultural neglect in the American home, and the curious intellectual deadening that seems to occur in many American preparatory schools, have not made these student minds unwilling. Frequently sluggish, sometimes inattentive perhaps, but

## THE PROFESSOR

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not consciously unwilling; and if unconsciously so, then hostile not to the teacher, but to the new idea or the discipline of thought. I speak as one largely ignorant of the battles of the market-place and stock-exchange, which our weekly story-papers have made so romantic, and thus am subject to correction; yet I dare assert that few experiences in the run of daily work are more stimulating, more exciting, than teaching.

I do not mean that the performance is thrilling for the class—undergraduates quickly become callous to all but the strongest stimuli. But to the sensitive teacher the hour is charged with quicksilver. You see the minds of the thirty-odd men below you in their faces. You feel their response when the current of interest sets strongly, and your points tell. You feel the relapse when, one after another, they begin to drift away, and must be swung back, like particles in the field of an electro-magnet, by some stronger charge of electricity, some more vigorous effort in yourself. It is nervous work, but it is quite as interesting, I think, as a business deal or a lawsuit; and the materials with which one works are far more agreeable;



## COLLEGE SONS AND COLLEGE FATHERS

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the results—when there are results—of an importance infinitely great.

In short, teaching is a public service in which enthusiasm is easy, but a service of infinite delicacy upon which real or apparent failure always waits. How essential is it that the public should be indifferent neither to the shortcomings nor to the success of the teacher! How important that the work into which he throws himself should be held more than perfunctory, more than ornamental! How foolish to cool the eager artist at his task, when that task is, or should be, the shaping of the next generation!

Indeed, the thrust goes beyond the professor. It is the community that suffers. The teacher will teach, if he is worth anything, until he is muzzled. And if he is a scholar he will devote himself to the most difficult research. But the breed is human. They would certainly teach better, their research might be better directed, if the public, their actual employers, were less indifferent to their work. Ask and it shall be given unto you. America asks too little of the college professor.

Nor is he sufficiently rewarded. I do not wish to harp upon the ancient theme of the

## THE PROFESSOR

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underpaid professor. That plaint has grown tiresome to academic as well as to unacademic ears, the more so since it should never have been a complaint, but a warning. The professor is not the greatest sufferer. His life is primarily a life of the mind. He is in possession of resources not so readily opened to the practical man of affairs. If he cannot afford automobiles and the opera, nevertheless books, nature, and the greatest of recreations, thinking, are his by right of conquest and opportunity. If he must mix the petty irritants of bill days, mortgage dates, and life-insurance payments with the proper atmosphere of his work, nevertheless that work is more purely congenial, more rewarding in itself, more stimulating than any other, except, perhaps, painting, music, or literature. It is not the professor who suffers most from the limitations that the lack of a true living wage imposes upon him; it is not even his wife. He is, it is true, most unfortunately cramped by this condition. Many and many a man has never taken the sabbatical year which his college allows him for stimulus and investigation, because he could not afford it. I remem-

## COLLEGE SONS AND COLLEGE FATHERS

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ber a talk of pictures, of cathedrals, of men and thoughts in European cities with an aging professor of rhetoric in a small college. Never have I known a man more sensitive to the impressions of other cultures; not many men, to judge from his work, have been so capable of turning all experience, and especially such experience, to profitable ends; but his talk was of London and Paris in the 'seventies; of conditions now merely historical, of men long dead. He had gone abroad when graduated from college. In forty years of service he had never been able to go again. Of course, if he had not married! But then they will marry, these professors! And here, too, there are limitations. A college statistician has recently asserted that on the present salary basis the professor can hope to afford, on the average, two-fifths of a child! Again, if the professor lives a life apart in order that he may be thrown neither with his economic equals, who are culturally and educationally his inferiors, nor with his educational equals, who set a financial pace he cannot follow—if he lives a life apart, he must forfeit the place in the community that every self-respecting citizen desires; he

## THE PROFESSOR

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must forfeit influence, and condemn himself to a narrow society. But he is not the chief sufferer. With all its minor hardships, his life is on the whole the most attractive that America offers.

The chief sufferer, of course, is the community. The factory of knowledge is operated for it. In the long run it controls the finances, and it controls the output. If it is pleased to run the plant on a short allowance of lubricant and fuel, there should be no quarrel with results. The engines whir along; some of them as fast as they can, some of them too slowly. And the stockholders, having paid for the installation, shut up their pockets, and are content to criticize (with more severity than discrimination) the imperfectly finished product which their education turns out. Ask and it shall be given unto you. If you wish better education, ask for it as strenuously and as intelligently as you ask for dividends; pay reasonably for it; and you will get it. If you desire that this inspiring profession should be either crowded with incompetents or open only to men of independent fortunes, continue to keep down the wage of the professor while

## COLLEGE SONS AND COLLEGE FATHERS

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the cost of living rises and you will get just that result with all its attendant dangers. And, finally, if you wish that your colleges should be mere finishing-schools, be careful lest the enthusiasm of the professor dulls, and you get your wish. The profession of teaching and the profession of research are highly agreeable and highly stimulating. But, like the other professions, they have their full share of the weaknesses of human nature. They are equally liable to sluggishness, equally dependent upon the attitude of the community. Deny or hamper their usefulness, and they will become less useful; ask much of them, and you will get some part at least of that for which you ask.

I have written in my first essay of the lovable, energetic, misguided undergraduate, and of the tact, the skill, and the guiding force which are necessary if he is to be really educated. It is here that the defects of the professor most quickly show themselves. And it is here that the already discussed attitude of average America toward the professor and things intellectual, an attitude that is certainly indifferent, and perhaps just a *little* contemptuous,

## THE PROFESSOR

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works the greatest harm. For this attitude makes teaching difficult, and it makes it difficult to get good men to teach.

A really good professor should be a Cerberus—three gentlemen at once. He should be able to teach; and though the desire to teach is strong and common, the power to teach, as we who try know, is slow of growth and rare in its achievement. He should be a good scholar; for, aside from the value of successful research, good teaching, as is well known, seldom proceeds except from a mind trained in fruitful investigation, deep stored with knowledge, and creative in science, in criticism, or in the realm of the imagination. The conflict between teaching and research, of which we hear so much, is like the conflict of science and religion. It exists only through a misunderstanding. It exists only because of the proneness of the academic authorities to recognize the scholarly rather than the educational manifestations of a power that all good teachers should possess. Finally, the professor should be an admirably sane, admirably broad, admirably human individual. And, really, such a man is not to be had by advertising in the

## COLLEGE SONS AND COLLEGE FATHERS

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evening paper or by corresponding with an employment agency.

Actually, the American attitude toward the academic profession makes the task doubly difficult. Time and again American parents who have amassed money enough for their children's children, or a whole college faculty, are led by a curious distrust of the intellectual life—or is it contempt for the mere teacher?—to drag away the promising son who, in tastes, in desires, and in ability, has shown himself qualified for the academic profession, in order to thrust him into business, where against his will he makes more money. We, in our cloistered simplicity, are at a loss to understand their point of view. But we understand too clearly the limitations thus thrust upon us in our search for recruits from among those to whom the road to culture has been open. As for the youth with all the qualifications but no money, he must be willing to risk financial instability, and he must make his choice at a time when new tastes burn within him for gratification, and when the desire for marriage and a home is like a rosy beacon urging him on the path to speedy independence. All this

## THE PROFESSOR

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does not help the college to find material which at the best is rare. Time and again we see the men we want reluctantly turn to less congenial or less hazardous pursuits.

But I would not insist upon this point. Perhaps by the operation of some obscure choice of the fittest, we draw, if not the best, at least the most worthy into the academic fold. Much more serious is the inherited attitude of the undergraduate. I say inherited, because it is not his own, as is proved by the fact that he loses much of it as his college experience progresses. It is a belief impressed upon his subconsciousness by his earlier environment, that the things of the mind are unsympathetic, are ornaments merely, are non-essentials. When his parents feel that the professor and the life of the professor and the thoughts of the professor are alien, or that a college degree is like the cut of a coat, useful not in itself, but only in its effect upon others, the circumstance is not hid from him. And this prejudice against knowledge is a barrier which the teacher must try, and often try vainly, to overcome before he can begin to teach.

The bell strikes the hour. The class as-



## COLLEGE SONS AND COLLEGE FATHERS

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sembles. Here is a group of fresh minds in fresh bodies, minds half-trained or ill-trained, unstored or ill-stored. It is the professor's business to train them, to store them; and he, if he has acquired any wisdom in his search for knowledge, is aware of how little he himself really knows, is still more aware of the excessive difficulty of choosing from that little what can be taught, what is worth teaching to these men, at this time, in their mood. And he is still more keenly alive to the difficulties of transmission. He knows that he must tune and retune constantly the waves of energy which pass from his mind to the class, for otherwise those sensitive but slowly adjusting receivers will catch no message. Outside the class-room there are ever-present wars and rumors of wars over educational policies, systems, changing categories of knowledge to fit changing conditions, opinions as to what to teach as different as if one doctor should say, "Give the patient digitalis," and another, "Fill him with bromides." He must follow the course of these battles, take his side, urge his own opinions, and suffer or gain by them. But at the same time he knows that these are but diplomatic

## THE PROFESSOR

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skirmishings, after all; that the real contest is in the class-room; that how much is taught is even more important than what is taught. He must decide upon what is worth teaching; he must also do that equally difficult and far more important thing, teach. Every barrier in the road, every brake upon his progress, is a hindrance to American education; and, next to his own shortcomings, the greatest of obstacles is the indifference to the means of education in careless, commercial America. Our city governments are illuminating examples of the results of such an attitude. Our colleges are instances of how much can be accomplished by devotion and enthusiasm in the face of it.

I am only too well aware that the current American belief that the professor is unsympathetic and often merely ornamental is sometimes justified by the facts. Some of us are pedantic and pragmatical. Some of us are indifferent to the course of events outside the gates, and too sure that since the heart of the world is unchanging, its brain is a constant also. Many of us are selfish in our pursuit of narrow research or flattering popularity; many are petty-minded and live upon intrigue as poli-

## COLLEGE SONS AND COLLEGE FATHERS

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ticians upon graft; many of us merely talk when we should be teaching. Most of us, indeed, have made our choice from among the teacher's seven deadly sins: contempt, arrogance, vanity, subservience, meanness, self-absorption, laziness—of which the greatest is contempt of the world, and the least popular, laziness. But almost to a man we are loyal to our profession, and we wish not fewer hours or more distinction or even more money (except as working capital), but a more active interest in our efforts, and a demand, which is at the same time more rigorous and more intelligent, for results. Ask and it shall be given unto you; not completely, for education as a science is still uncertain, and as an art will always remain difficult; but more abundantly than now. We are trying to teach a man how to live while being successful in business. We are trying to train men to find out what is really useful in life. Criticize, blame, oppose the process, and make your demands as exacting as you will, but do not be indifferent to it. Indifference is education's primal curse.

I knew a college professor who but recently completed a long life of work. In his youth he

## THE PROFESSOR

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fought through the Civil War, and then turned his energies into the no less strenuous battle for American scholarship. To be near him was to be charged with electricity, so that the students who came under his influence gained a new consciousness of the value of wide and accurate knowledge. And even the hopeless Philistines, whose ideals were those of the market-place, learned to speak with respect at least of the shining ones of the intellectual life, as the awed barbarians learned to reverence the beautiful gods of Greece. When he found that his teaching ceased to vary with the varying needs of his class, he left the class-room, and untiringly began to pour out from the storehouse of his mind the accumulations of his long career, vigorous, interested, effective as when he began. If the academic profession can attract and hold and give opportunity to such men as the late Thomas Raynesford Lounsbury, it need not ask for condolence; rather the professor may say like Hotspur in "Henry IV.":

"Nay, task me to my word; approve me, lord."

But the professor is human. If America regards him as ornamental, he may turn lazy

## COLLEGE SONS AND COLLEGE FATHERS

on her hands and snuggle down into a life which, with all its limitations, is for men of taste and culture the most delightful in the world. If America dampens his enthusiasm, if he is asked to be merely a cultivated and ineffective gentleman, it is the community and not the professor who will suffer most from such a policy; it is the community who will pay most heavily for the mistake.

## THE LUXURY OF BEING EDUCATED

**I** TRAVELED for a long day last year across the Kansas prairies with a very typical group of graduates from American colleges. They were from the East, the Middle West, and the Far West, brought together merely by the exigency of the moment, like a Freshman class in college. The journey was quiet; we sat in the club-car at our ease, and conversation was general. I was struck by the narrow range of this conversation. Whether it flowed freely among a group at the observation end of the car, or became more intimate when chairs were drawn together by the buffet, a few topics—business conditions, real estate, anecdotes, and reminiscences—seemed to bound it. Interest did not go further. The men themselves were far from uninteresting. From the Oregon apple-grower to the New York broker, every

## COLLEGE SONS AND COLLEGE FATHERS

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one was a factor somehow or somewhere in American life. They were not uninteresting; but they were uninterested, except in their narrow ranges. The broker's interest in apple culture went no further than its financial aspects; the apple-grower's interest in Wall Street was romantic merely; both yawned when I talked of the Russian story I was reading, or tried to follow through the window the route of the Santa Fé trail. There was nothing novel in this experience; but it was illuminating. It seemed to me that these men had failed to get their money's worth of education.

It is very curious that so few care, or dare, to get their money's worth from the American college. The poor man gets the best returns. He must ask the college first of all to make his boy self-supporting—more efficient, if possible, than his father; and he gets, as a rule, what he pays for. But the poor man is not the typical college parent. The typical parent of our undergraduates has stored up more or less capital; he has a position waiting for his son; his boy will be able to live comfortably, no matter what may be the efficiency of his mind. The ability to support himself, the power to

## THE LUXURY OF BEING EDUCATED

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make money, is certainly not the most important quality for this boy to possess. Very commonly, especially in the endowed institutions of the East, money-making in his family has reached the saturation point. It is unnecessary, it may be inadvisable, or even wrong, for him to enter gainful pursuits. What the son of parents in comfortable circumstances requires is not so much a narrow training in the support of life as a broader one in how to utilize living. His interests, quite as much as his mental powers, need stimulus, development, and discipline.

I know that in stating the situation so flatly I run head on into an American tradition—or prejudice. The American democracy—even when in no other way democratic—believes that the American boy, though millions may hang over his head, must work for his living, must make money. With a righteous fear lest his moral fiber degenerate in useless studies, the well-to-do father grudgingly allows his son to enter college, reminds him constantly that the nonsense will be knocked out of him as soon as he graduates, and hurries him into business as quickly as possible, breathing relief



## COLLEGE SONS AND COLLEGE FATHERS

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when he is safe in an atmosphere where labor is measured by returns in cash. If there were danger of starvation ahead he could not be more anxious to fix his son's mind on the duty of earning ten dollars a week. I do not wonder at the fathers—even in the instances to which I limit myself, the well-to-do parents of intellectually able sons. They are applying the American tradition as it was applied to them. But what is the effect on the boys?

Sometimes it is good; often it is unfortunate; occasionally it is disastrous. A Junior comes into my office for a talk. He is clear-eyed and intelligent, but conventional from his clothes to his conversation. His father controls an enormous business, and he is to begin at the bottom of the corporation as soon as he graduates. I gasp at the figures of output and return that he casually mentions. I wonder just how he will regard the responsibility which the course of events will certainly bring. The prospect does not worry him in the least. He has inherited shrewdness and self-confidence. He'll "do as dad did." But of interest in the problems and the possibilities involved in this vast ownership I discover not a particle, and

## THE LUXURY OF BEING EDUCATED

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little more in what his means will enable him to do with his life. A fast motor, a country club, a good boat, a yearly trip to Paris—his ambitions go no further. Among his college courses, English composition interests him because “dad” says he’ll have to write good business letters; economics a little because it deals with cash; English literature in a barely discoverable degree because of the useful culture which is supposed to flow from it. All the rest of the world of knowledge—historical, scientific, esthetic—is a dull blank. It does not interest him now; it will never interest him.

It is not to be expected that the college can ever make an intellectual of such a youth; nor should it try to do so. But if we could have interested him in ideas; if we could have extended and lifted the range of his pleasures; widened and deepened his conceptions of commerce; given him a “social conscience”—we would have accomplished something. It is not to the credit of the college that the time-spirit in this youth was too strong for its influence to combat; but the blame does not rest entirely upon the faculty. “Dad” must

## COLLEGE SONS AND COLLEGE FATHERS

---

share the responsibility. He sent the boy to us with eyes closed to everything but money-making and fun. Perhaps this youngster will put all his energies into doubling the family fortune; more probably he will discover the weakness in the American tradition of work, break through it, and enjoy himself according to his lights. Of these undesirable alternatives, the second is at least the more human and perhaps the more rational.

But the youth whose plight arouses my sympathy and indignation is of a different type. His kind is not so abundant in the colleges, but its numbers are increasing yearly. He best represents, I think, the new generation of educated Americans.

I knew him first in Freshman year: a pleasant boy, well-mannered, with the air of one who had lived in a cultivated home. He was not an "honor man"; he seemed afraid to throw himself into his work. And yet his finer accent, his occasional interest in music, art, and books, made his classmates a little shy of him. He was said to be, possibly, a "high-brow," or a "freak." But he was a good athlete in a small way, and a "good mixer."

## THE LUXURY OF BEING EDUCATED

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As soon as he learned the conventional fashion in dressing, and acquired the proper slang—which the boys from the big “prep. schools” had from the beginning—he got on very well. He “made a society,” was on the track team, wrote for the papers; bade fair to have an exemplary college career, and to become one of the fine fellows who merge indistinguishably into a common type and depart as one man from college.

However, in Junior year came a reaction. I have seen it hundreds of times—a faint dawn of intellectual awakening; a sudden interest in the world as distinguished from college life. The mind grips upon knowledge and moves slowly with it, as the wheels move when the gears of an automobile engine slide into first speed. He was roused to an enthusiasm of thinking by a stimulating book. Ideas that he did not fancy began to anger him—a sure sign of intellectual progress. He began to ask intelligent questions. Then he fell into a depression over his ignorance. He began to criticize the curriculum. Men talked in his room till late at night. He bought special cigarettes and posed for a little while as an

## COLLEGE SONS AND COLLEGE FATHERS

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esthete. But when he devoted a month of a summer vacation to reading up on religion, and came to a conclusion (so it seemed to me) as original as it was wrong, I felt sure that we were dealing with a mind.

This youth came from a family in which cultivation and reasonable wealth had been hereditary for several generations. There was no pressing need for him in the family business, no reason why he should not be educated to the full; in fact, his parents prided themselves on the education that they were giving their son. And yet, when Senior year came, and his desire for knowledge awakened with the approach of the end of the conventional period of training, clouds appeared on the domestic horizon. I gathered that he was not sufficiently anxious to enter business; that he did not know what he wished to do; that college seemed to be making him unpractical. I was consulted as a friend, first by him, then by his mother. I told his anxious mother that her boy needed to learn more, to think more, before putting his knowledge and his desires to the test of practice; that, if their means permitted it, nothing would be so good for him as

## THE LUXURY OF BEING EDUCATED

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a little more education. She thanked me—and sought a more practical adviser, who suggested that the youth be put into the bond business so that he should waste no time while making up his mind as to his future profession! If he had wished to be a lawyer, or a doctor, or an engineer, they would gladly have given him the extra years of preparation. But he merely wished to think and to know: to study more economics, more history; to read widely; to carry through some guided work in social service, until he could shape his philosophy of life, control his mind, and find out what he wished to do with his powers. And this, coming in no recognized category of youthful endeavor, was unpractical, aimless, or leading perhaps to idleness and eccentricity. He must get to work!

They chose wisely, according to their lights. I think that this youth would have responded to the intellectual stimulus which the university could have given him. I think that he might have been led into study for its own sake, into research, perhaps into teaching. Having means, he would have been able to follow his bent wherever it led him, and taste of the delights

## COLLEGE SONS AND COLLEGE FATHERS

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and the rigors of academic life, without its meannesses and its sordid cares. He would have cut loose from business for ever, and perhaps distinguished himself. But distinction of that kind did not interest his family. They have made a mediocre business man of him; and if that is what they wanted, they have moved sagaciously. Nevertheless, I do not believe in their lights.

I am far from urging that all thoughtful, intellectually hungry boys should be drawn into the academic life. Hundreds of youngsters like the one I have described would have carried the profits of a fuller education into business and the professions. As business men, they would have gained in mental power, but most of all in a sense of proportion and a better understanding of the aims, the advantages, and the possibilities of the life they were choosing. As lawyers or doctors or engineers, their efficiency surely would not have suffered from a broader outlook upon other aspects of the world's interests and the world's work, and their lives would have gained much. That this fuller education, with the keener interest in life which comes with it, would have been a

## THE LUXURY OF BEING EDUCATED

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luxury for such men, I readily grant. But this is the age of luxuries. The same parent who balks at an extra year of education lavishes automobiles, large incomes, and less desirable favors upon his children. Most fathers who send their sons to college regard luxuries as a right—if not automobiles, riding-horses, good pictures, and yachts, at least warm houses, electricity, travel, and far more expensive food than is needed for sustenance. Granted that an education beyond the requirements for self-support, but well within the demands of an active, pleasurable, intelligent life, is a luxury, are there not many Americans who can afford it?

I am assured that the best thinkers in the educational world are spending their energies not in lengthening, but in shortening, the period of education; in cutting down waste, in increasing efficiency. I can reply that such work is invaluable. Let us improve, condense, reform, wherever we can, making four-year courses into three, if they teach only three years' worth, concentrating and improving the work in our schools until they turn out boys of sixteen as well educated as French or German students of the same age. Let us



## COLLEGE SONS AND COLLEGE FATHERS

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save what time we can, so that the youth who can afford no more education than that provided by the usual college course may get it more speedily or more efficiently. But it is not a question here of providing the best education in the least time for those who must hurl themselves into the economic struggle. It is a question of providing the best education, regardless of time, for the boy whose struggle will be not so much to support life as to use it properly. If such an education is a luxury—and when I think of the pre-eminent need of the times for more intelligence, I begin to doubt my term—then it would be easy to present statistics from our colleges which would flatly contradict the platitude that in all things America is luxurious.

If the parent with a comfortable living or a good position to give his boy would put less emphasis on the rigors of the coming financial struggle, and more upon the advantages of a well-opened mind, the effect upon the college would be tremendous. The undergraduate would feel it first of all. Upon many, the influence, it is true, would be only indirect. Out of a college class of, say, three hundred,

## THE LUXURY OF BEING EDUCATED

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perhaps fifty are merely well-dressed, agreeable young animals, whose minds have already attained their maximum of breadth. It is a fair question whether they are not already spending too much time in education. Perhaps one hundred and fifty belong to the great average—which is, after all, made up of too many varieties to be called an average. Dull men, who work, nevertheless, with faithfulness; bright men, lazy by nature; busy men, far too much concerned now with social or commercial success to spend much more energy in thinking—all these would feel that the world outside was beginning to value culture and the intellect, and, without radically changing their habits or their aims, would nevertheless manage to get what they felt to be their share of mental broadening. But it is of the remaining one hundred that I write: the men who are not content to take at second hand, or do without, the illumination of the last century of science, or the accumulated knowledge and inspiration of the earlier world; the men whose minds are opening and are worth opening. Many of them are eager for active life, and will not wait for more education; many of them are poor and

## COLLEGE SONS AND COLLEGE FATHERS

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cannot wait; but many more would choose the luxury of a deeper preparation if anxious parents, moved by a short-sighted public opinion, did not force them, still immature, into the world. They may know the text, "Man shall not live by bread alone"; but in the face of practical adults asserting the contrary, and urging them to come out and earn their living, they are not likely to apply it. For it takes a clearer sight, a stronger will, and more independence than even the exceptional boy is likely to possess, to see that education in some instances may be the first and most important profession.

The effect upon the professor of a more generous parental attitude toward education would be as great as upon the undergraduate, and more calculable. The college, as distinguished from the technical school, has always proposed, as its ideal, to educate for living—and this term includes both earning one's living and enjoying it. The difficulty now is that the faculty, the parent, and the undergraduate each grasp their interpretation of this broad purpose and pull as hard as they can in different directions.

The faculty, on the whole, lean too far

## THE LUXURY OF BEING EDUCATED

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toward the idealistic side of this education. The extremists among them maintain that in college a boy should study nothing practical, nothing with potentialities of money-making. But education is surely broader than they think. It is a poor education which in teaching a comprehension of living does not help toward earning the daily bread. In truth, it is, and I suppose it always will be, a fault of our profession that we turn away from the utilitarian aspects of our subjects, and are more interested in their cultural than in their commercial value. Our lack of experience in turning thought into dollars makes us unduly depreciate what might be called the business end of a liberal education.

But where this error exists we have been driven into it by the obstinacy of parents, who will not see that the power to make money is only a by-product of education—by well-to-do parents especially, who send us youngsters who will have to assume vast responsibilities and use vast opportunities for service and pleasure, saying, Teach my youthful millionaire how to make more money! We have had to fight an ingrained American prejudice;

## COLLEGE SONS AND COLLEGE FATHERS

no wonder that we have become a little prejudiced ourselves in the course of the struggle.

For all these reasons, the reactive effect of even a portion of a class sent to college in sympathy with the ideals of the college professor—which are, after all, those of a true liberal education—would be very great. We would not turn out geniuses, or make over America; but that deathly indifference, sprung of conflicting aims, which hangs like a fog-bank over the American college, would lift and lighten. The inefficiency which is to be found in teaching as well as in business, and the inherent laziness of the human animal, would prevent a too rapid clearing of the atmosphere. We would not be blinded by the flash. But I think that professor and father and son might begin to work together toward a common purpose; and that the teacher would teach more broadly and more successfully the things which knowledge can contribute to life.

But if education should be numbered among the permitted luxuries of American life, the greatest effect would be on a department of the university that means little now to the undergraduate and less than little to the

## THE LUXURY OF BEING EDUCATED

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American parent. I mean the graduate school, the business of which is to give advanced training in the pursuit of knowledge. The well-to-do parent is not especially interested in the productive activities of the graduate school, and I do not see why he should be. He thinks of it, if he thinks of it at all, as a highly specialized laboratory for turning out unreadable treatises on the sources of unreadable plays; or accounts of ridiculously named chemical compounds; or pamphlets on Sanscrit inflections; or philosophical theories whose very titles he does not understand. It is absurd to maintain that he should be vitally interested because these represent the outposts of knowledge. No one blames him for a lack of interest in the valves of a steam-turbine, in how to modify milk for a ten months' baby, in the manufacture of breakfast foods. These things also are important. He cannot afford to despise them because they lie beyond his *métier*; but enthusiasm is not demanded of him.

In another phase of the graduate school, however, he might well be more interested. I mean in the opportunities it offers, or could offer, to his boy. We have heard much of

## COLLEGE SONS AND COLLEGE FATHERS

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what the graduate schools can do for the country. I am more concerned just now with what they might do for the undergraduate who is to be allowed the luxury of a little more education.

My own experience was typical only in so far as my condition resembled that of hundreds of boys who come to Senior year in college with a distressing vagueness of aims, a feeling of incapacity, and one certainty—that they are not yet educated, that they are not yet ready to enter the world. As it happened, I was allowed to choose the path of the graduate school.

I entered uncertain, doubtful of what interested me, guiltily conscious that I ought to be earning ten dollars a week in an office or a mill. I found myself in a new atmosphere. We were starting over again; we were boasting of our ignorance; we were clamoring for knowledge; yearning for opportunities to study in a field which grew wider and wider under our touch. Far from separating ourselves from life, we seemed to grow for the first time acutely conscious of it. Reality, instead of being a simple affair of making money, marrying, and

## THE LUXURY OF BEING EDUCATED

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dying, began to grow vast, complex, and infinitely interesting. It was with difficulty that we held ourselves to the little segment which was assigned to us for study. Our thoughts leaped ahead—though still vaguely—to the practical, concrete work we must do, and we were distressed at the opportunities for knowledge that must be left behind us. Ennui became unthinkable; idleness a crime. Yet we were boys still, and intensely human boys. We sat late with beer and pipes, and talked nonsense far more effectively than in undergraduate days; we took up athletics, which in college we had left to the teams; we were even merrier because our mirth came as a reaction from hard work. When we compared experiences with the intellectually sympathetic among our classmates who had gone out into the world, we found that they, too, had felt the spring and the stimulus of directed, purposeful endeavor. But except where they had already discovered a career, their enthusiasm was less than ours, their energies not so active; they did not seem to be on such good terms with life.

Of course, in a way, we were specialists, and



## COLLEGE SONS AND COLLEGE FATHERS

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this seems to remove my personal experience from the argument I am advancing for the luxury of a full education. In reality, I think, it does not. For we were specialists only by compulsion, because, since most of us were preparing for teaching or scholarship, we knew that we must confine most of our labors to one field. And I think that it was, and is, one of the defects of the graduate school that it drives too quickly into the more highly specialized branches of knowledge; that it puts all the emphasis upon preparation for scholarly production, just as the world outside puts all the emphasis upon money-making.

In fact, the graduate school looked with a hardly concealed contempt upon the candidates for a simple M.A. degree who would not go to the bitter end of any one line of endeavor, who were seeking merely a further preparation for life. And that was its weakness. There it shared — though the accusation would have angered its professors — the American prejudice against the luxury of a general education. In all that seething intellectual life, with its burning interests and increasing powers, many of them saw no health except in the student

## THE LUXURY OF BEING EDUCATED

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dedicated to research. Those who left us by the way—for the law, for business, for diplomacy, or for literature—they regarded as strayed sheep.

No one who knows the results would be so blind as to attack the value of that specialization in research which has already placed our graduate schools beside those of Germany and France. But why have we failed to realize that in the means they offer for fulfilling a general education they can satisfy a real need of contemporary America? The life we tasted there would be better for many a thoughtful, hesitating Senior I have known since than a half-hearted plunge into a world which did not yet interest him; a year or so later it would have sent him, eager and enthusiastic, into an activity which his broadening mind could have chosen for itself.

It is easy to abuse America and the American parent for parsimony in education, but it is not very satisfactory. To begin with, it is futile to abuse a tendency, and the American attitude toward liberal education is a tendency—and an inherited tendency, which makes it all the more difficult to escape. The American

## COLLEGE SONS AND COLLEGE FATHERS

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parent has, as a rule, but recently attained economic independence and ended his up-hill climb. His sons can start on the level; they will not have to climb as he climbed. But climbing is what he best understands; and he must be liberal-minded and a little prophetic in his vision if he does not send his boys to college to prepare for the needs, not of their generation, but his own.

It is easy to abuse the undergraduate for not striving harder for the kind of education that will make him most happy and most useful. But to what advantage? The patient is not to blame when the wrong medicine, or too little medicine, is prescribed for him! And furthermore, that minority of our undergraduates who really need more education *are* asking for it, *are* struggling for it, though often in a blind and half-conscious fashion. Every college teacher not case-hardened in intellectual superiority knows and is rejoiced by this fact.

In truth, the college teacher must take his share of responsibility for the niggardliness of American education. I suppose that we realize the essential importance in contemporary life of the intelligence which comes from a full edu-

## THE LUXURY OF BEING EDUCATED

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cation, but I confess that I think we do not always act upon our realization. I find myself constantly resisting the temptation to say: "This, gentlemen, will not interest you: it leads to an appreciation of life; it shows how to rise to the possibilities of living; but it will never make a cent for you, and it is difficult. You must study it; but you won't be interested." I hate this hierophantic, better-than-thou attitude in myself or any other teacher. What right have we to assume that the higher realms of the intellect are reserved for the scholar and the theorist? What right to smile superciliously at all interest in knowledge that does not lead directly toward scholarly production? What is gained by asserting that study must be bleak and austere; that learning must be unworldly and exclusive? The colleges also have been indisposed to allow the competent—who do not wish to become specialists—the luxury of a full education.

Conclusions will quickly be reached by those who take the trouble to look about them. We are not so rooted in our prejudice against work that is unmeasurable by cash as to have produced no examples of those who are profiting

## COLLEGE SONS AND COLLEGE FATHERS

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themselves or the country by the luxurious excess of their education. The young millionaire who is using his wealth efficiently, enthusiastically, wisely for social service and social knowledge, is no longer so rare as to be unfamiliar, though he is still a curiosity. He is drawing dividends for himself and others from a deeper comprehension of the needs of society than experience without education could have given him. And many a man not a millionaire, though master of his income, is using his business or his profession for broad and interesting services to the community, made possible by the knowledge and the interests with which education has endowed him. Less valuable, perhaps, and yet invaluable in a genuine civilization, is another and more familiar type: the business man or lawyer who has learned how to live outside his office; whose pleasures are not limited to the physical and the sensual; who has a hinterland, a background, as H. G. Wells puts it; who is a cultivated, sympathetic, intelligent, broad-minded man first, and a good business man or lawyer afterward. This, too, is a product of education—an almost inevitable

## THE LUXURY OF BEING EDUCATED

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result of a full and true education, when the mind is capable of receiving and profiting by the riches of knowledge and the stimulus of ideas.

Observe, on the other hand, the sons of parents in comfortable circumstances, the boys who were guaranteed a fair start in life whenever and however they entered upon practical work, and who sought only the utilitarian in college. Have they gained by their loss of culture and a broad education? Are they more useful to the community, more interesting to themselves; are they happier? Those who left us when their interests were just awakening—have they gained by the year or so of time they have saved?

Consider those familiar figures in American life: the bored youth selling bonds "to keep doing something"; the half-hearted successor to a big business who lets his subordinates carry most of the work; the wealthy youngster who conducts a gambling business on the stock-exchange because he must have some excitement; the rich idler too intelligent to find the usual means of time-killing efficacious; the heir to a million making more money doggedly

## COLLEGE SONS AND COLLEGE FATHERS

because he doesn't know what else to do. Some of these misfittings, no doubt, arise from difficulties of temperament, or defects in character; but many of them are due simply and solely to insufficient education. These men have not been raised intellectually to the level of their opportunities. Their interests are still dormant. Nothing very serious is the matter with them; they get along well enough according to common opinion. More education, whether in college or in graduate school, was not a necessity; it was a luxury; but it was a luxury they could well have afforded.

## COLLEGE LIFE AND COLLEGE EDUCATION

**S**INCE the West has been tamed, Alaska been made into a political question merely, detectives become lecturers or magazine-writers, and bandits proved to be only mental degenerates, romance, or at least the romantic life, has become a scarce article in America. This accounts, probably, for the revival of melodrama and the success of the photoplay. The less chance for a living romance, the keener our appetite for an artificial variety. And this leads me to wonder why so little advantage has been taken upon the stage and in books of the most romantic experience still available in everyday America—I mean, “college life.”

I asked this question once of a novelist, suggesting the care-free, vigorous experiences of happy college living as a subject for a book that would crystallize the vivid sensations



## COLLEGE SONS AND COLLEGE FATHERS

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of the most intense period of youth. He replied that life in college was too immature, too superficial, too lacking in significance for good story-telling;—that it could not be made precise without taking too seriously what were, after all, gambols in pasture of colts not yet familiar with the road. Perhaps he was right. Certainly the excessive rarity of books or plays that present “college life” without caricature or over-emphasis goes to prove his point. Nevertheless, even though its romance be ephemeral, mere dawn shades of pink that fade in the light, romance it is of the right rose quality—all the romance that many an American will ever possess.

It is a little sad that the stern idealist feels it his duty to train his heavy guns upon an experience so rich in charm and so great in its rewards. If he is a Jeremy Collier, execrating youth because it is youthful, demanding responsibility where irresponsibility still has some value and much delight, I sympathize with him as little as with the respectable resident of a college town who grumbles “ruffian” whenever some one shouts “Fire!” from the dormitories in the calm of an April night. If he

## COLLEGE LIFE AND COLLEGE EDUCATION

complains that "college life," romance and all, has set itself in dangerous opposition to the more serious business of a college, I am forced to assent. But I assent reluctantly, since this opposition seems to me one of the most depressing and unfortunate circumstances in the history of the American college. "College life" and college education ought to get along well together. They should complement, not contradict, each other; for their services, when rightly understood, are curiously alike.

The professor (who is supposed to represent the serious side of college education) and the undergraduate mix well enough—outside of the class-room. In fact, when thrown together in circumstances entirely free from restraint—in a home, or a club, or on a tramp across the hills—they have an attraction for each other much stronger than that which draws together the outer world of older and younger men. As an instance, my steps in the later afternoon lead me past two clubs, one for older men only, one where graduate and undergraduate may meet and mix. With noteworthy frequency I find myself turning in at the club of mingled ages. Is it because I like to talk in the presence

## COLLEGE SONS AND COLLEGE FATHERS

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of those who, on account of their accustomed deference to professorial authority, will give my words weight? I have charged myself with that human weakness, and answered "not guilty." Mortal men are subject to such temptations; but in this case there is a better reason. I like to hear *them* talk.

"For we were nursed upon the self-same hill." The life they live was my life, and is still a part of it. I see its false emphasis, its misguided energies, but let any one attack it and I rally to its defense. Nor is this collegiate loyalty unreciprocated by the undergraduate.

And this is as it should be, for the vivid experiences and fresh interests of "college life" are part of the educative process in which the professor of the liberal arts is engaged. The boy who lives a keen, full life in college—and where can you live more intensely and more enjoyably?—not only has a good time out of it all; he learns to know what is worth while in pleasures and occupations. He learns the art of choice—choice of pleasures, choice of occupations, choice of friends, choice of the experiences that seem to him valuable. And

## COLLEGE LIFE AND COLLEGE EDUCATION

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still more important, his experiences give him an open mind toward other men's tastes and pursuits.

So much for life in college. But the end of liberal education differs from this only in degree, not in kind. Liberal education gives a knowledge of the principles by which men act, have acted in the past, and will act in the future. The man who acquires it learns to know what is worth while—but from a far broader experience than his own personal associations can give him. He also learns the art of choice—though here the choices are in knowledge and belief rather than in the more domestic relations of life. Most of all, he broadens and deepens his mind until it is “liberalized,” until it is made free of the world that man's intellect has conquered for us.

And thus college education in its high measure and college life in its minor fashion both drive at the same general results. Both aim at a sense of proportion in living; both aim at a useful, active knowledge of true values in life. But unfortunately for our peace of mind, and unfortunately for the prestige of the American degree, college education has not

## COLLEGE SONS AND COLLEGE FATHERS

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been as successful in this country as college life. It is this which has led to the conflict of interests which all recognize. It is this which has led to the teacher's depreciation of college life, and the undergraduate's neglect of college education, both of which I deplore.

We will never find the remedy by turning sour faces on the intense and romantic life of the campus, as if our ideal were a day-school where athletics consisted of dumbbell exercises and the pupils should know one another not half so well as their books. College life has been too genuinely successful for such silly contempt. The proof is that the most noticeable characteristic of the college graduate today is neither culture nor efficiency nor intellectual grasp—all of which in varying measures he may possess—but an easy attitude toward the world of men. He may take his B.A. with little knowledge and less mental discipline to his credit; but he cannot get through four years of an American college without learning to adjust himself gracefully to all manner of men and many varieties of ideas. If he has not been given vision, at least he has not lived perforce under a rain of

## COLLEGE LIFE AND COLLEGE EDUCATION

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ideas and in a nest of different opinions without learning to distrust the dogmatic. If he has not been taught to think for himself, at least he has not dwelt in terms of unusual intimacy with companions of diverse interests, and personalities still more diverse, without learning to be courteous to a new point of view when he meets one, without learning a little of how it best profits a man to conduct his life and direct his thoughts. I cannot always tell a college man by what he knows, or by what he does; but I can well-nigh invariably distinguish him if, in a miscellaneous gathering, I can see how he listens, or hear him talk. And these virtues he owes not entirely, but in large measure, to the informal education that comes from merely living in college.

But the soil of college life is light. An easy manner, a ready tolerance, a flexible mind, are greatly to be desired; they do not, however, guarantee the sense for values and the power to handle life that only education in a stricter sense can give. Playing on the teams, competing for social honors, living in happy haphazard in dormitories, acquiring knowledge in droves, and sharing intensely in the vivid, strenuous

## COLLEGE SONS AND COLLEGE FATHERS

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activity that surges in and out of an American college—all this is admirable preparation for learning what is worth while in life. But ingredients stiffer than sociability and competitive endeavor must be present if we are to grow a knowledge of how to live that will weather the storms of practical life and resist the chill of middle age. The soil must be richer.

And this is why the success of college life has been, on the whole, so unsatisfactory. We have been graduating "good mixers" by the hundred; but somehow we have failed to turn their breadth of mind into breadth of thinking. They are liberal enough in their opinion; but they lack liberality of spirit. They are tolerant enough of their fellows; but they lack the knowledge that must accompany tolerance in life. It becomes increasingly clear that the American college graduate needs more education in the good old narrow sense of the word, more training in thinking, more thought. He needs an honest knowledge of the great principles that underlie human thought and action, the principles that have been crystallized in the modern humanities—history, literature, social and natural science, art, and the rest.

## COLLEGE LIFE AND COLLEGE EDUCATION

It is through these abstracts and elixirs that he must deepen his comprehension of why and how things happen in life. Otherwise, no matter how active and how varied his extra-curriculum life, he must intrust his course (as many have to do) to a harsh pilot—experience—find out as he goes, learn fully at the end of life, perhaps, but less at the beginning—in a word, forego that college education which is less romantic but more essential than college life.

And it is this very college education, let us confess it frankly, that has been less successful than college life. It has not so strongly stamped our graduates. It has not entered into their imagination so pervasively; nor, except in the realm of practical efficiency, has it so deeply influenced their after life. I do not mean that our play in college has had a greater absolute effect upon this generation than our work. I mean that, with due regard for relative importances, play has accomplished the most. No need to reiterate the old reasons: that no man can place his heart and soul in the keeping of the football team, and at the same time learn economics; nor center his entire ambition on “making a fraternity” and



## COLLEGE SONS AND COLLEGE FATHERS

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still get educated. If college life runs thus to excess it is partly because the charms of divine philosophy and other college subjects are not strong enough to hold it back. Instead of damning college life, its romance and its realism together, let us search out other, deeper reasons for the unsatisfactory achievements of liberal education.

Two at least I see with clarity. The first is that the average undergraduate does not practically and effectively believe in breadth of thinking. He does not believe in it with the only kind of faith that is worth anything, the faith that works miracles—and illustrates his skepticism daily by refusing to take education with half the seriousness he expends upon the hours between afternoon lectures and dinner-time. I have discussed elsewhere this lack of faith—a resistance in the class-room that every professor feels, a resistance as strong, though almost as hidden, as that of a coil of wire to the current that runs through it. And it is scarcely necessary to add that the successful rivalry of college life is also a factor and a large one. But the second reason I have not discussed, partly because it is highly personal,

## COLLEGE LIFE AND COLLEGE EDUCATION

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partly because if the first were remedied it would no longer exist. I mean the deadly effect of this American indifference to education upon the college professor himself.

I do not know whether it is scientific, but at least it is instructive to estimate the professor's expenditure of energy in an average recitation—lectures are less laborious because, requiring less of a class, they meet with less resistance—in, say, foot-pounds. Thirty foot-pounds, let us suppose, go into the arduous but stimulating process of preparation. Thirty are consumed in the pleasant and invigorating operation of really teaching an aroused and interested class. Well, then, a good forty are exhausted, burned up, wasted, in merely overcoming resistance to knowing—in fighting indifference, and sometimes sullen dislike. I am not trying to escape from the teacher's burden. The normal student mind dislikes hard work just as the normal body dislikes it. There will always be inertia to overcome; always the resistance of matter against which mind must struggle. But here is a needless expenditure; here is unrecompensed loss. If college education has not lived up to the

## COLLEGE SONS AND COLLEGE FATHERS

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greatness of its opportunity, this is one explanation. College education, after all, *is* the college professor. And he is wearied before he can begin his task.

Worse lies behind. He is not only wearied; sometimes he is rendered inefficient; sometimes he is de-educated in those very qualities that it is his business to teach—breadth of knowledge, breadth of sympathy, wisdom in knowing and choosing the means of life. The sluggishness of college education is sometimes said to be due to the lamentable fact that, in plain American, the professor is not always “up to his job.” If this is true, why then (to keep to plain American) one reason is that he exhausts himself in the attempt to “get it over,” and becomes less broad than his profession, less stimulating than the subjects he should teach. He may lose *his* sense of proportion, and, with far greater opportunities, become less valuable to the cause of liberal education than the trivialities of college life.

I remember once being first bored, then amused, then fascinated by a traveling-man who, through a long journey over the Pennsylvania hills, interpreted the country about

## COLLEGE LIFE AND COLLEGE EDUCATION

us in terms of vacuum cleaners. The streams were potential sources of current for his machines; the villages he knew by the names of the purchasers; in the towns he exulted over virgin stores of still unsucked dirt. So it is occasionally with some professors of the modern humanities. They have worked so hard to sell their commodities that they have come to put an undue emphasis upon their value. They see the world in terms of their own subjects, and otherwise are blind.

Many such men exist, and some help to make the world more humorous. I know a biologist who when he dines out has an uncomfortable habit of studying the effect of the food values consumed upon his neighbors. There are stories afloat in most college towns of the perils through which the children of psychologists must pass before they reach the age when they can protect themselves against experimentation. Carried to an extreme, this makes the so-called "academic manner" that makes men mad. This leads to an insistence upon the superior value of sociology or literature or history in comparison with all the rest of knowledge or experience. One may forgive, perhaps, the member

## COLLEGE SONS AND COLLEGE FATHERS

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of a faculty who neglects the "big game" of his college for matters he considers more important. One does not forgive the man who makes it plain to his classes that without an expert knowledge of physics or economics or history life on this contemptible planet is entirely without justification. Such a teacher has cut his efficiency in half, because he has lost his sense of proportion. He has lost it, like the Israelites, in struggling desperately and devotedly against the stubborn resistance of the Philistines. But no matter how noble the cause, it is gone.

I am reluctant to be called pessimistic, and so I hasten to add that instances of this kind are not nearly so common in American universities as critics believe. The undergraduate whose interests are confined to football, musical comedy, and the success of his fraternity is easily persuaded that the man who tries to teach him government or geology takes his subject too seriously. Nevertheless, here is a very real reason why college education does not always "get over" in college. The teacher who has to pound away too hard may forget what he is pounding on, and almost why. He

## COLLEGE LIFE AND COLLEGE EDUCATION

is like the woodpecker that pecked on a rubber sponge until its head came off. From that portion of his labors that is ineffectual he suffers, as all must, an undue measure of weariness and pain. Often he is tempted, and no wonder, to turn his best energies in more profitable directions, and give his second-best to his indifferent classes. In any case—whether weary or humorless, discouraged or evasive—he may become a drag upon college education. The effort required to interest Americans in getting educated has been costly to him, and costly to them also. Nor can we look for relief to those happy spirits who are not troubled by resistance; who sail on and over the recalcitrant mind while they teach, spreading their sails to the breeze of their own eloquence, content with indifference if it is amiable, and uncritical of interest so long as it is awake. They will never lead us into blue water, for their sense of the worthwhile is of too light a draught. They belong to college life rather than to college education.

The whole question of success or failure in American education is just now tremendously pertinent. Even being an American is a fear-

## COLLEGE SONS AND COLLEGE FATHERS

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ful responsibility. As I read the morning paper in a meditative mood, I feel as may have felt the inhabitants of some walled town in sixth-century France, when the old world to the southward flared into confused warfare and fell away in ruin. Like them, we must stand for a while on our own feet; like them, I suppose (for history does not record their psychology), we search our hearts to see what civilization is in us. The experience is sobering. One realizes how ill-digested is our European culture; how little it has worked as yet into the blood and sinew of a distinctive Americanism. One realizes still more how many alien illiterates there are who have scarcely begun the assimilative process—how many alien literates who may refuse the native education we offer to them. American culture will have to be modified; that is clear. And yet it must be kept culture, and must be kept American, if America is to remain (and become) American. I do not suppose that any of us yet realizes the magnitude of the task, nor the responsibility it will place upon our colleges. We shall need faith. We shall need to work with, not against, the professor.

## COLLEGE LIFE AND COLLEGE EDUCATION

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It is hard to write of education without letting the pen fly into generalities. The term itself is so broad, so meaningful, that it is difficult to keep to the concrete. Emerson states as well as any one the difficult task that lies before those who would teach the modern humanities, but even Emerson escapes into somewhat nebulous verities:

Can rules or tutors educate  
The semi-god whom we await?  
He must be musical,  
Tremulous, impressional,  
Alive to gentle influence  
Of landscape and of sky,  
And tender to the spirit-touch  
Of man's or maiden's eye:  
But to his native center fast,  
Shall into Future fuse the Past,  
And the world's flowing fates in his own mold  
recast.

And yet college education is really just as concrete as college life. For it amounts to little unless it makes a man or woman speak more kindly, act more wisely, think more truly. And it is good for little until it has crystallized and become a part of life itself.

It is this that explains and sums up the nature



## COLLEGE SONS AND COLLEGE FATHERS

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of the problem that I have been discussing in this essay, and of many other college problems upon which I have touched in earlier pages. Education, like Bergson's vital force, may be regarded as always beating upon the stubborn matter of the brain, trying to transfuse it, trying to become real, to become tangible, to become life. Like Falstaff's "honor," education is a word; it is air. It has no real existence except in the educated man. And he is a hard-won triumph over intractable matter—flesh, blood, and bone made against their own sodden nature to act by thought and according to intelligent will.

Your teacher is merely an instrument. Abuse him, and he will be a bad one; weary him, and he will be ineffective; destroy his sense of proportion, and his usefulness will decrease.

Your college graduate or parent is a directing force, to be used on one side or another of this great struggle, a struggle renewed whenever a child comes to the age of reason, or a race moves upward into the light of civilization. To many observers it seems that the "average American," of whom, as is right in a democracy,

## COLLEGE LIFE AND COLLEGE EDUCATION

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we are all afraid, has taken the part of bone and blood and flesh. At most he has tolerated higher education. Sometimes he has sneered at it, and sent his children to college wrapped in the triple brass of indifference, ready to perform lip-service only.

Your undergraduate represents matter—tractable or intractable—in whom we try to grow that sense of values which is the fine flower of liberal education. He begins—or at least his finer spirits begin—to grow weary of being intractable. He begins to strike out at the stupid conventions of the American college, which require activity and condemn thought. He begins to criticize the curriculum and his own attitude toward it; he begins to look out upon America; is superciliously contemptuous of our magazines, amused by our best-sellers, repelled by the narrow intensity of our business life. He even begins to be interested in American politics. In a word, the undergraduate is at last getting educated.

It will be hard for the average American to throw his influence upon the side of spirit—and the professor—in this struggle with matter. It will be hard for him to accept the new era;

## COLLEGE SONS AND COLLEGE FATHERS

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for the success of college education will reveal itself first in a respect for many things—science, art, literature, music, political and economic theory—for which he has had scant reverence. The increased efficiency in business, in the professions, and in money-making generally that is bound to follow, will show itself much more slowly; as will the still greater improvement in the art of living that should be the perfect consummation of a successful training in the modern humanities. But you cannot down a sense of due proportion once it begins to ripen. And fortunately, the Americans who send their children to college are average only when taken in the mass. Individually, most of them will be on our side when they understand the importance of what we are trying to “get over” with such labor and weariness, against such an undue and unwise resistance from minds whose profit we seek.

There is nothing wrong with the *idea* of the American college, except growing-pains. It has not failed. It has but recently gone to trial; and on some counts it already stands acquitted. Our college has given us a new

## COLLEGE LIFE AND COLLEGE EDUCATION

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kind of American, more versatile, more gregarious, more urbane, more moral in the pursuit of affairs, and more accessible to ideas than all but the pick of the generation before the Civil War. That it has not yet guaranteed real education, or insured true breadth of thought, is due not to the romance of college life, but to the lack of faith in college education. And that the professor should have to fight for things lovely and of good report until his arms are weakened and his vision dimmed reveals a lack in the average American of precisely that sense of proportion which it is the function of the college to teach. His sense of humor has failed him for once. It needs to be liberalized; it needs to be educated.

## CULTURE AND PREJUDICE

**C**ERTAIN British essayists of the perverse school have discovered a new way of dislodging from the minds of their readers a prejudice against new ideas. They blast it out with a paradox. The method is surprisingly simple. You begin by asserting, for example, that dogs are more moral than men. The statement catches the attention of the sleepest reader, arouses his antagonisms, and forces him to mobilize his powers of resistance. That is, it wakes him up—which was all the wily writer desired. To withdraw from an untenable paradox—as, for instance, to show that dogs are moral according to their lights, and men immoral by theirs—is as easy as to make one. The paradox is the bell on the engine of logic; it is the horn on the automobile of thought.

## CULTURE AND PREJUDICE

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Some horn, some bell, is necessary in order to get a hearing amid the clamor of criticism, argument, and diatribe that hangs like the roar of a city over our educational councils. Greek has been carried out from the noisy assemblage in the agonies of dissolution; Latin has been banged into decrepitude; mathematics is tottering; grammar and spelling are prostrate, with new and uncouth shapes—blacksmithing, millinery, sex hygiene stepping over them into the curriculum. To one who wishes to say a quiet word in this confusion a paradox may be pardoned. Is it paradoxical to assert that the American attitude toward education is more faulty than the curriculum?

There are two kinds of education: one certain, the other uncertain; one direct in its application and obvious in its results, the other indirect in its methods, with effects that must be deduced from the life of the recipient. One education teaches how to work in order to live; the other how to live in order, among other things, to work. The first we have renamed "vocational training," given its ancient precepts a fresh coat of paint, and set it up as an enviable novelty; the other, for want of some

## COLLEGE SONS AND COLLEGE FATHERS

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more specific title, we still call a "liberal education."

These two kinds of education are complementary and equally important. Both have been always necessary to civilization. Both always will be necessary; and their respective services are defined not by theory, but by the needs of men and the times. Yet prejudice, obstinacy, and blindness have set their advocates by the ears and led to scholastic wars that differ from the fierce conflicts of the medieval universities only in being more wordy and less picturesque. I have heard the rights and wrongs of a liberal education bitterly discussed in Parisian cafés and upon New England mountain-tops. At the extremity of a California cañon, beneath rock walls as high and more remote than Yosemite's, on a trail that hung between waterfall and precipice, I have been stopped by a high-school principal until I should tell him what I thought of vocationalism in the schools. No modern teacher or student or parent can much longer escape the necessity of taking a stand in this controversy and—what is far better—thinking it out.

## CULTURE AND PREJUDICE

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There is nothing new in vocational education, nor can it always be distinguished from the other variety. A false emphasis leads us to think of it in terms of those applied sciences—electrical engineering, chemistry, hygiene—that are new in principle, or those crafts—dressmaking, bookkeeping, stenography—that are new in the curriculum. But Latin, as has often been said, was vocational in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, when a knowledge of that tongue was a prerequisite for all the professions except arms. Mathematics is both vocational and liberal. Even such abstract subjects as astronomy may become vocational, as fiction reminds us, when the hero, shipwrecked upon an island, saves his life from cannibals by predicting an eclipse. All training directly applicable to the problem of subsistence is vocational, although its nature may vary with the race, the age, and the environment involved.

If man could live by bread alone we might be content with vocational education. By that very intellectual unrest that makes for evolution he cannot. Having eaten, he must learn to use the life he has preserved. But while



## COLLEGE SONS AND COLLEGE FATHERS

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sustenance is theoretically a very simple problem—being only a question of how much you can earn and what you can buy with it—the use one makes of the vital energy into which life transforms is the most complex and difficult of all questions. Religion, ethics, education, all bear upon it, intersect and blend so that it is almost as difficult to say what teaches one to live as to answer the question of how to live itself. It is enough to observe that education has a part here which is not vocational, and which is enormously important.

This is the province of liberal education. Its services are indirect, because its effects must be transmuted into the art of living; they are uncertain in the same proportion as all life is illusory and never to be confined in measures made by man. Nevertheless, although these services are indefinite in their breadth, at least we can specify some of them. We know, for example, that the mind must be able to grasp abstractions; and so we apply mathematics. We know that it must have perspective and background if it is to understand the passing show of brief reality allowed it; and so we instil history. We know that it

## CULTURE AND PREJUDICE

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must be able to interpret character, to feel the loftiest emotion, to perceive beauty and enjoy it; and so we give it literature and the arts. Man is to be liberalized. He is to be taught to comprehend life.

It is much more difficult to teach comprehension of life than control over nature. Consider, for instance, the necessary imperfections of such an instrument as history, which, itself but a crude and inaccurate representation of an earlier period, must be interpreted and assimilated by the reader before it can be applied to a new age where many factors are different and some unknown. And compare it with the applied science of civil engineering, where a fixed body of principles turned upon a mountain or a swamp will yield invariable results. Indeed, it will never be easy to teach the liberal arts; and we have increased the burden of the task by an obstinate conservatism which clings to the old because it has been successful and distrusts the new because it may fail. The curriculum of liberal education is always and persistently behind the times. Nevertheless, we must try to make it effective. We must teach control over thought as well as

## COLLEGE SONS AND COLLEGE FATHERS

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control over matter; we must make America liberal as well as efficient, or drop back from civilization.

✓ If we have failed to do so, it is chiefly because the American college and the American student and the American parent have persistently misunderstood the nature, the value, and the purpose of liberal education. The schools and colleges, for example, fought science as a liberal subject for a quarter of a century after Huxley had demonstrated its cultural value. The student supposed to be studying the "liberal arts" wandered often through the curriculum, like a man in a dream, not knowing what he wanted or why he wanted it. The parents who did not want their sons to become specialists were as vague in their conceptions of the education they favored as the entrance candidate who wrote, "The Greeks put athletics into their colleges and so invented modern education." Prejudice and ignorance have sadly hampered liberal training in America. There is real danger of a victory for "vocationalism" more costly than many a defeat.

A working country, full of unskilled immigrants, governed by the masses or their

## CULTURE AND PREJUDICE

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representatives, whose highly educated classes are all-powerful neither in politics nor in finance, such a country will and should desire vocational education. The thing is so inevitable that one wonders far more at the sleepy endurance of purely theoretical education for generations than at the demand only a few decades old for technical education in the colleges and the still more recent clamor for a secondary-school training in the business of life. To oppose such a desire by empty talk about the unique value of the humanities as a means of educating everybody is as dangerous as it is foolish. To hold back from our obligation to improve the working efficiency of the race is a plain dereliction. Every impartial observer must welcome the progress of vocational education, whether in institutes for the negroes, public schools, or Harvard, Columbia, and Yale.

No one need fear that we may be too successful in teaching the vocations. The danger lies in the possibility that when the vocation-alists have forced their program upon the somewhat reluctant schools they may be as blind in their triumph as their opponents have been obstinate in their conservatism. Culture

## COLLEGE SONS AND COLLEGE FATHERS

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will persist against most odds. The desire to think truly, to live finely, is inherent in every high civilization. You cannot eliminate it by restricting the liberal studies which by common consent contribute to its development. Men are born into the world every day who in almost any conceivable environment will strive after culture and in some measure attain it. Leadership in any direction brings with it the possession of culture in its rudiments and the desire for more. Whether or not a nation is educated liberally, it will have its cultured classes. And while in a modern democracy these classes may not control the government, they are bound to lead thought and sooner or later to inspire important action. Therefore, if the impetuous cohorts who are demanding an education completely vocational in our schools, and to a less extent in our colleges, should conquer without restraint; if in their hour of victory they should make their system as inflexible in its exclusion of all that is not "practical" as the "culturists" would gladly make theirs exclusive of all that bears directly upon work in the world, a dangerous separation of classes would inevitably result.

## CULTURE AND PREJUDICE

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In the late Roman Empire the governing class, which was recruited from men with a legal plus a liberal education, became more and more distinct from the military class, made up in general of professional fighters whose training had been exclusively vocational with that end in view. "But as these hardy veterans," says Gibbon, speaking of the barbarians and their control of the legions in the early fourth century, "who had been educated in the ignorance or contempt of the laws, were incapable of exercising any civil offices, the powers of the human mind were contracted by the irreconcilable separation of talents as well as professions. The accomplished citizens of the Greek and Roman republics, whose characters could adapt themselves to the bar, the senate, the camp, or the schools, had learned to write, to speak, and to act with the same spirit and with equal abilities." As a result, a population competent to govern but not to defend itself was exposed by an army scornful of civilization to the fury of the savage North.

I know too well the dangers of analogy between modern civilization and the Roman, to use this example as more than a useful

## COLLEGE SONS AND COLLEGE FATHERS

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illustration of my point. If we exclude or unduly delimit a liberal training in our colleges, and especially in our schools, as sure as night follows day there will be a decrease, and a sharp one, in the intellectual sympathy which makes intellectual leadership possible. Cut out history, cut out literature, cut out mathematics beyond its elements, and in a stroke you cut three of the bonds that unite society.

If this statement of the case is too figurative, give it a more practical turn. Journalism is the most powerful agent of government in America; and the potentialities of journalism for good government are largely conditioned by its power to present facts, arguments, ideas to the multitude. Already it has been necessary to reduce the political nourishment thus offered to the last degree of digestibility. But so far the writer of an editorial or a news article has been able to count upon a body of knowledge and a training in thought common to all. In the eighteenth century it took several decades for the French peasant to comprehend the ideas of liberty and equality which the philosophers labored so hard to present to him. The il-

## CULTURE AND PREJUDICE

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literate immigrant hears without comprehension what the New York school-boy now understands with ease. Cut out history from the schools, and a section of the student's brain will cease to react to the thought of the editorial-writer; cut out literature, and in another direction his responses will die; reduce mathematics, and he will relax his grasp upon abstract thought. Abolish liberal education for the masses, confine their training to the narrow limits of manual exercise and the mental discipline directly involved in the production of wealth, and they will be insulated from such broader movements of the intellect as good journalism represents almost as effectively as if cotton were stuffed in their ears and their eyes blinded. The separation of classes that will follow will be more dangerous than the industrial separation, because it will be intellectual and spiritual in its divergences.

All this, of course, is no argument against vocational education. It is a plea for intelligence on the part of the advocates of greater working efficiency in America. It is a plea for an irreducible minimum of liberal education beyond which the upholders of vocational train-



## COLLEGE SONS AND COLLEGE FATHERS

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ing will proceed at their peril and to the nation's prejudice.

Far more important than the vain quarrels of conservative and radical is the difficult endeavor to discover the limits of this irreducible minimum. I speak only for the colleges. In the colleges we propose to educate the leaders in the higher vocations, the leaders in culture and in thought. But if a common bond of knowledge and point of view is essential for the nation at large, it is none the less essential for its so-called educated class. The mechanical engineer must have some comprehension of forces beyond those material ones with which it is his business to contend. If he is to labor in a struggle for social betterment with the lawyer, the doctor, the professor, and the bank president, he must know their language and they his. All must have some common introduction into thought. Life itself, of course, supplies, as it requires, a bond of union. But how foolish not to prepare for this bond in the preparation for life which we call education! The irreducible minimum of a liberal education in college is a generous proportion of energy spent upon the liberal arts. And this

## CULTURE AND PREJUDICE

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energy must be expended in defiance of the pressure that a complex technical training exerts upon the student whose studies are to be chiefly vocational.

The grotesque vision of a race of specialists—engineer animals, business animals, law animals—burrowing, scratching, building in their world, each incredibly efficient in his own *métier*, like the swallow, the ground-hog, or the ant, each unable to communicate or co-operate with his neighbor specialist, is worthy of the pen of Anatole France. As a reality, however, it is impossible—but not because such inhuman specialists could not be developed. Their prototypes exist already in every American university, and still more abundantly in every American city, where engrossing business has shut out the view of fields, sky, God, the value and purpose of life itself. Such a race is impossible because a civilization of absolute specialists would fly apart like a bursting bomb and leave nothing behind but fragments and a stench.

The irreducible minimum of cultural training is not the only issue for which the believer in both kinds of education must contend. He

## COLLEGE SONS AND COLLEGE FATHERS

must also protest against a wide-spread misconception of what is "practical" in education.

What is "practical" in education? We cannot accept the answer of the youth who is taking a "culture course" because it is the thing to do. He muddles through his work, absorbing only what is injected by forcible feeding, explaining in moments of fancied sincerity that, since culture is not "practical," it is not worth real work. What nonsense! In a state of savagery nothing is practical that does not support life or save it. In civilization everything is practical that enables one to live happily in a complex environment. The ability to survey a field is practical, but so in equal measure is the power to reason correctly from historical analogy; so is the power to enjoy intelligently a good book. A liberal education, for the right man, is more practical than any other. And the right man for a liberal training is any and every student who will profit more certainly by a general education in the fundamentals of living than by a special training in technical knowledge.

Nevertheless, one sees dozens of boys unfitted by their tastes and aptitudes for technical

## CULTURE AND PREJUDICE

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work, although thoroughly educatable along more general lines, who have been sent to engineering schools or laboratories in order to get a *practical* education. I know farmers and bankers who, as a result of such an error, have been trained as mechanical engineers, lawyers and business men who have been trained as chemists, only to put their practical specialty in their pockets and forget it. Could anything be more impractical? Could anything be more wasteful than a special education which excludes by its rigorous demands all higher instruction in general knowledge and then is discarded? Could any one be less valuable to society than a business man, let us say, who fails after ten years and then proposes to fall back upon his never-digested and now forgotten training as a civil engineer? And yet this is where our distrust of a liberal education has too often led us. It is a melancholy but illuminating spectacle to watch the progress of those unfortunate undergraduates who are urged by pressure from behind to become practical in a way that for them is the reverse. Some go upon the rocks and sink before their sophomore year; some yield up the helm and

## COLLEGE SONS AND COLLEGE FATHERS

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drive on toward the limbo of the second-rate, from which native talent alone can save them; others, after tacking from shoal to shoal, take on board a new pilot, come back to the starting-line, and begin their education again with better prospects at the expense of wasted energy and time.

In the preceding paragraph I have written of a group of Americans in no way distinguished by hidden longings for culture, by esthetic qualities that set them apart from the everyday, or by any rarity of spirit. I have in mind merely a thoroughly normal youth who happens to be non-technical instead of technical in his interests, who, if left to himself, will drift toward business or law rather than the professions that require a closer specialization and more definite taste. Such a man will profit by the liberal arts, even if he never becomes "cultured," for even a modest knowledge honestly gained of history, literature, the languages, scientific, social, and political thought, must influence his life. Such a man will waste his energies in vocational studies. But the perverse blindness of America to what is really practical in education carries with it a menace against a far smaller but an even more important class.

## CULTURE AND PREJUDICE

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It is impossible to study the individuals that surround us without observing that, to borrow the expressive terms of heredity, certain traits are recessive, others dominant. In the majority of our friends and neighbors, strong and delicate imagination, moral sensitiveness, keen sensibility, spirituality, and the religious instinct are all of them recessive. In a smaller number, one or more of these rarer qualities appear. In a minute minority all, or most of them, are dominant. This minute minority, with the more numerous body who are united to them by one bond or another of sympathy, are not the leaders of society, though in some measure they may be the salt of the earth. Much of the rough work of the world, and some of the noblest, must be accomplished by men of a coarser and perhaps a firmer mold. But such men and women are indispensable to civilization. They preserve the vision without which the nation perishes. They make the art that interprets life and adorns it. In times of moral crisis it is their surer instinct that saves us, if we are saved. Their finer spirits only are proof against the allurements of easy wealth or the specious necessities and rude intoxication of

## COLLEGE SONS AND COLLEGE FATHERS

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war. The province which the psychologists of earlier periods assigned with more necessity than truth to women belongs in the future to these men and women who are qualified to feel and think truly where others think and act in error.

But it is precisely for all who belong in one respect or another to this order of humanity that a strong and confident course in the liberal arts is most essential. Without such a course, and the public opinion it implies, there is constant danger that their native instincts will be starved or thwarted. In a country where such gifts as theirs may be called impractical, and in colleges where their talents must be developed in an atmosphere of doubt and distrust, in the company of those who dally with the liberal arts while despising them, they are exposed to the temptations of dilettanteism and the dangers of diversion from their proper careers. If a fondness for books, or a love of nature, or responsiveness to music, or any other of the symptoms that in early youth are likely to indicate such minds as I have described, are in America regarded as signs of effeminacy or presumptive failure; if, when it comes to

## CULTURE AND PREJUDICE

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education, we try to make them practical in the current and fallacious sense of the word, why, then again we are impractical. The liberal arts conserve such spirits as these and turn their dreams into acts and power. America has as yet scarcely learned the lesson that the rarer gifts of the earth, if wasted, can be replaced, if at all, only at a heavy cost. When shall we apply the moral to the conservation of the rarer qualities of man?

I began with a paradox which I hope is no longer paradoxical. The education we offer in America, with all its defects, is more reasonable than the attitude of American parents and American students toward a choice between its varieties. Through an obstinate refusal to consider the different capabilities that inhabit different men they have tried again and again to put the wrong key in the wrong lock and have grumbled because the door has not opened. As for the schools and the colleges, they have made cultural and vocational education the subject of clamorous controversies, whereas all depends upon the boy—upon the training that will educate *him*, and which, therefore, in the only true sense of the word, will be practical.



## THE COLLEGES AND MEDIOCRITY

**T**HE writer of fiction may be said, with only a pardonable exaggeration, to put himself in the place of the Almighty. Venturing to create a man, he shapes the character of his creature, molds and refines his brain, and prepares a living instrument by which events and circumstances can be controlled or directed toward a reasonable destiny. If he is a bad writer, the results deceive only children. But if he is modest enough to study life, and imitate it, then he shares the mysterious power of creative evolution and earns his tribute of respect.

The teacher also feels—at least in his remote subconsciousness—that he shares or should share this power. He, too, must make character, brains, efficiency; and if the part he plays is relatively small, at least when he labors over a boy in whom the man is still uncreated,

## THE COLLEGES AND MEDIOCRITY

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he is engaged in no work of the imagination merely. Except for the parent, he is the only professional on the job; and, next to the parent, he is held most responsible for the result. The praise usually goes to the amateur elements in the task—friends, college spirit, the rigors of athletics, and environment; the blame falls upon the professional educators—the parents and himself.

I am not much concerned with the justice or the injustice of his claim for services rendered. This is one of the questions that must go up to the Supreme Court of the Last Judgment, for no sublunary arbitrator can disentangle the evidence. I merely wish to explain the earnestness with which each college professor accepts his responsibility, and asks, as he looks over his entering classes, "Who among you shall be saved?"

He means, of course, "Who among you shall be educated?"—that he identifies salvation and education is due to his professional bias, and may be taken for what it is worth. When a college education became fashionable, when the little file of the sons of ministers and lawyers entering the college gates was joined and sub-

## COLLEGE SONS AND COLLEGE FATHERS

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merged by the multitude of everybody's sons—rich, poor, stupid, brilliant, ambitious, and the opposite—his question first became acute. Now it is burning. Shall the colleges spend their abundant energies and their great, if not too effective, powers upon the few fit, or upon the mass, the multitude of the mediocre? Shall we seek quality or quantity? I know that the question has been answered a hundred times in history; but it has not been answered for twentieth-century America. For America just now provides the greatest exhibit the world has ever seen of successful mediocrity.

There are no contented poor on this side of the Atlantic except in the backwaters of the East. There is no single class content to recognize the intellectual or material superiority of the rest. Every one is pushing onward and upward. The poor man, as we are told every day, may be rich to-morrow; the ignorant goes to night-school and will learn; the drummer hopes to run the business for which he is traveling; the hired man will own land as good as that he plows; the clerk will be a partner in the firm. Even in the universities no institutions like the fellowships of Oxford and Cam-

## THE COLLEGES AND MEDIOCRITY

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bridge can exist. In America not even the scholar is willing to stop at such a position. He must go on—or try to go on—as far as the rest. Never before has a nation exhibited so complete a spectacle of millions of insects all swarming upward toward the light.

This view may be optimism. I do not think so. For in nine hundred cases out of a thousand the goal of all this striving is mediocrity. Your son nowadays does not hope to be President. He climbs toward a much lower round in the ladder. The laborer wishes to reach the middle class. The middle class wishes to be richer. The upper class—if we have one—hopes to make sure of its perch. Our cities reflect the spirit. They rise like the wind from the empty prairie or the dense forest into a reasonable similitude of the “business district” of St. Louis or Chicago, and then stick at a level of ugliness which is not the less ugly for being metropolitan. Our homes show it. A semi-colonial with porcelain tubs and hardwood floors bounds the imagination of all but the artistic temperament or the millionaire. Our literature shows it most distinctly of all. American newspapers and magazines main-

## COLLEGE SONS AND COLLEGE FATHERS

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tain, perhaps, a higher average of composition than is to be found elsewhere, and seldom rise above that average. We show it ourselves; for consider how much the speech of one American business man resembles that of another. You can sojourn for days in smoking-cars, hotel corridors, or cafés without encountering an idea that descends to the naïve ignorance of the peasant or lifts above mediocrity. Even our multimillionaires, the characteristic "great men" of America, although in the manipulation of natural resources they have risen above the ordinary, seem to be mediocre as personalities. The newspapers are generous of space to every episode in their domestic history; yet what could be flatter than their remarks as reported by strangers who have rescued them, unaware of their greatness, from a broken-down automobile; what less illuminating than their comments on success in life; what less interesting than their lives when once the millions have been made? As a nation, we are mediocre.

This may be pessimism. I do not think so. It is the very essence of the American experiment that a vast body of men and women should be raised *as a whole* to a level of comfort,

## THE COLLEGES AND MEDIOCRITY

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of intelligence, of happiness, which, if far below the best, should be also far above the worst. And this involves, this requires an enormous increase in the total amount of mediocrity. Democracy and free immigration combined inevitably make for such a result. It had to come; and our day's work is still to bring more and more of the illiterate, the incapable, the unfortunate up to the level of the mediocre, even though the burden weighs us down, and the result seems to point toward a future that is drab and dull and commonplace. No race can escape from its circumstances, and these, in part by choice, in part by the chance of inheritance in a rich and undeveloped continent, are ours.

I would not deal so freely in generalizations if I did not feel that they were self-evident; nor would I write of this subject at all if I did not believe that it lay on the very heart of the American colleges. I do not suppose that the college is more vital in American life than any one of a dozen agencies committed by nature to idealism and usefulness. But I think that no individual confronts more inevitably the problem of the mediocre than the professor in an American college.

## COLLEGE SONS AND COLLEGE FATHERS

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For see the mass of undergraduates which are drawn from all the social classes, but chiefly from those that have already attained mediocrity, and flung at his head. Among them, to be sure, are a few of the brilliantly ambitious who will use more than can be given to them; but in far greater numbers are the brilliant and unambitious who will use nothing unless it is forced upon them, the stupid but well-meaning who have to be fed with a spoon, and the backward and unmeaning who must be cudged along after the rest. Where shall the bewildered teacher apply his goad? Whom shall he permit to fall behind? How shall he keep pace with the leaders without scattering the herd?

There can be no question as to personal choice. I have heard more than one man of experience remark that there is no pleasure in teaching an undergraduate whose grade is below seventy-five per cent.; and, while I do not believe it, I have seldom heard the statement contradicted. Indeed, in the universities, the best scholars on the faculty, unless they love teaching for itself or are controlled by necessity or circumstance, gravitate generally

## THE COLLEGES AND MEDIOCRITY

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toward small and selected classes or graduate work. And it would be easy and pleasant for all of us to concentrate upon the exceptional students—to educate them, even if the rest should go unwashed by the waters of knowledge. When circumstances are favorable, the forcing of a needle into soft iron is not more difficult than to push one really new idea into an immature brain. But if circumstances are unfavorable, if there are thirty brains of all ranges of capability to be manipulated, the difficulty is multiplied. I can give one or two men with good minds and a good environment behind them—I can give them, if they want it, a comprehension of the strange and moving literary force called romanticism, which, springing from obscure reactions in the psychology of a race, spreads through thought and speech and action until it transmutes into literature and becomes a rosy semblance of the life men would desire to lead in a world shaped by their imagination. Or I can try to give the same conception to all thirty, knowing that half the minds will be as blank as before, that most of the remainder will return confused and broken images of the truth perhaps less valuable than blankness,



## COLLEGE SONS AND COLLEGE FATHERS

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and that the few fit will profit less, because, of necessity, less has been given them.

The literal-minded will probably reply, "Don't try to teach romanticism." Well, I do not—to elementary classes. But this merely alters the terms of the problem—the solution will be the same. It would be easiest, it would be pleasantest, it would seem to be most efficient in the American colleges, to sacrifice the mediocre to the able, to dismiss quantity and hold fast to quality. And yet every one knows that this is precisely what we do not do. Every one knows, or can find out for the asking, that in our schools and all our undergraduate departments nine-tenths of our labor is spent upon those least able or least likely to profit by the results.

The cynic will remark that our perversity is due to the attitude of the powers that be, who, in the contemporary college, are almost as sensitive to the merits of quantity as the "boosters" of a Western town. The cynic would be partly right. We are still in the pioneering stage in the college world—or think that we are—where sheer numbers seem necessary in order to hold down the investment.

## THE COLLEGES AND MEDIOCRITY

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And yet the pressure supposed to be exerted in order to keep classes large is so much less—at least in colleges of a high rank—than is popularly supposed, that I am inclined to think this motive unimportant in the problem.

It is not a crude desire to keep the college "big"; nor is it weak human nature, hesitating to eliminate a nuisance when that nuisance is a friendly, fresh-spirited boy; it is the American passion for democracy that makes us lavish our energies upon the multitude of the mediocre. For a belief that the right to an education is as universal as freedom is ingrained in the American mind. The college professor may never have recognized this as the cause of his perverse devotion to the mediocre. He may never have said, he may never have thought, "If the republic is to be saved it is by raising the average of intelligence." But his actions prove that somewhere in his subconsciousness this belief is stirring. It is this hidden passion that manifests itself in the attitude I have called perverse.

This passion for democracy is the most sincere and possibly the most valuable quality in our whole educational system. When I

## COLLEGE SONS AND COLLEGE FATHERS

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glimpse its subterranean motives I know why my heart is sore if the ninety-and-nine average men are unmoved by my teaching, even though the hundredth man has responded beyond my hopes. But when I calculate its effects I realize that it is responsible for some of the difficulties in which American education flounders. It is the quintessence of a noble idealism; but we have followed it blindly; and sometimes it has led us into the mire.

Everywhere but in so-called graduate work, and in some measure even there, this desire to do something for every one has made us neglect the exceptional man and actually favor the mediocre. There is no question, I think, as to the fact, and a comparison of the best products of English and Continental training-schools with our own graduates will bring it home. They permit fewer men to call themselves educated; but these men are more highly trained, more efficient intellectually, than ours. In science, in scholarship, as in literature, we still look Eastward for leaders.

In the past our deficiencies were due to inferior equipment and less extensive resources. But now we can offer neither poverty nor im-

## THE COLLEGES AND MEDIOCRITY

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maturity as an excuse. Our failure to provide the best possible education for the best men can be attributed only to our desire to give every man his equal chance, a desire which, more deeply interpreted, means that we have preferred universal mediocrity to an aristocracy of brains and a commonalty of ignorance. We educate a class, not individuals. We boast of the type, of the average our colleges produce. In my own university one hears far less of Jonathan Edwards, of Evarts, of Calhoun, or of Stedman than of the "Yale man." This indirect evidence, I think, is even more significant than the results of matching Harvard with Oxford or Columbia with Berlin.

Are we wrong? Am I absurd when I feel that my class must come forward as a body—the lazy millionaire's son, the earnest child of an uncouth immigrant, the able inheritor of sufficient brains—must come forward, all of them, or the year's work is not well done? I do not think so—for I believe in the American experiment. I believe in the passion for democracy—even when misguided, even when blind.

But it is blind. That is the chief criticism one has to offer. The French of the Revolution

## COLLEGE SONS AND COLLEGE FATHERS

were so afraid of aristocracy that in the new republic they reduced all titles to "citizen." We have been so afraid of slighting the democracy that in the colleges we have reduced all education to an average. The needless folly of limiting ourselves to such a program is manifest. We have energy enough and to spare, and money to make the mare go faster and farther than any one has yet driven her. It is perfectly possible to give signal ability its proper opportunity without failing in our duty to the multitudinous mediocre. This is not an argument for aristocracy in education. It is common sense. For we need leaders in the American experiment quite as much as a continuously rising democracy. And in the next stage of development we shall need them more.

The establishment of "honor" schools and "honor" courses is a tardy and so far rather imperfect recognition of this fact. I have no program to propose for their development. Its details must be settled in the colleges, not in an essay. But when we see that our admirable loyalty to the democratic ideal has held us back at the same time that it has kept us true to destiny, we shall put more intelligence

## THE COLLEGES AND MEDIOCRITY

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into our reforms. The college must continue to be an institution for the increase of mediocrity, for mediocrity is infinitely preferable to ignorance; but it must also provide the exceptional man with the training by which he alone can profit. Like the Yankee contrivance which can be used for both ladder and chair, it must perform both the functions demanded of it, even at the risk of being less than best in one of them.

The worst fault, however, into which our age-long service of mediocrity has led us is a weak-kneed, pusillanimous deference to mediocrity itself. The college has borrowed the vice from every-day American life. For example, the most deadly weapon in the yellow journalist's armory is the term "high-brow." A politician may be called "grafter," "boss," or even "muckraker," and escape unscratched; but if he is denounced as a "high-brow," and the label sticks, his career is ended. A playwright or a novelist may be written down as "cheap," he may be said to plagiarize, he may be shown to be vicious or unclean, without serious damage to his reputation; but let him be proved a "high-brow" and the public will fly from him

## COLLEGE SONS AND COLLEGE FATHERS

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as if he were a book-agent. Now the widespread American belief that knowledge makes a man impractical is responsible for some of this curious odium; but far more is due to our servile deference to mediocrity. The weight of public opinion is usually against the expert, the specialist, the thinker, the exceptional man in general; for public opinion, whether right or wrong, is always mediocre; and there are few among us who do not in this respect yield somehow, somewhere, to public opinion. The doctor distrusts the advanced political theorist, the politician distrusts the advanced dramatist, the dramatist sneers at the innovations of science. We are all made timid by the enormous majorities that uphold mediocrity.

The college is like a salt pool on the ocean shore, where young sea-things are growing in the gentle wash of waves that come from the world without. There is a public opinion in college that is as like the public opinion without as a microcosm can be to a macrocosm. And just as the public opinion without favors mediocrity in everything but making money, so this public opinion encourages mediocrity in everything but athletics and social advance. No need to

## THE COLLEGES AND MEDIOCRITY

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dwell upon this. The fact is better known than the gradual change that has come over college ideals in the last decade, until now the minority in favor of culture, knowledge, mental keenness, and other attributes of a high civilization is comfortably large.

But the majority still exists, and its burden weighs heavily. It is curiously difficult for a teacher who is no mental machine, but human, to estimate at his true intellectual value a fine young fellow who already possesses the "push" and the "punch" that are still sufficient for a reasonable financial success in America. It is enormously difficult to insist upon standards of intellectual accomplishment above the mediocre level with which the public is content. Let the graduate be deficient in some category that even mediocrity has mastered—say, spelling or letter-writing or punctuation—and opinion howls him down; but in the higher departments of theoretical knowledge the world outside is quite content with a fifty or sixty per cent. efficiency, and deprecates more as an accumulation of material not readily transmutable into cash.

All this the teacher feels, and as his class



## COLLEGE SONS AND COLLEGE FATHERS

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become personalities to him, he inclines further and further toward their own opinion, the college world's opinion, everybody's opinion, of what a student should do and know. Then, at the crisis, the insidious, unrecognized passion for democracy, the subconscious feeling that it is his *duty* to raise this dead-weight as much as may be permitted him, enters to complicate the situation. He begins to overestimate mediocrity, knowing that he must serve it. His pride dictates, "The results, all things considered, are not so bad." He blames himself for a meticulous idealism. He makes the fatal error of assenting to mediocrity, and thereby ends his career as an agent for raising it. Or he violently reacts against the service required of him, antagonizes his class, and becomes equally valueless, except for graduate work. Here is a familiar college tragedy.

It is easy enough to fulminate from without against the "low standards" of the colleges. Try to raise them and you will find that America is on the other end of the lever. It is difficult to meet such a situation without truckling to mediocrity; it is very difficult to fight the mediocre while loving democracy.

## THE COLLEGES AND MEDIOCRITY

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It is difficult, but not impossible, and the difficulty would be less if those chiefly concerned—the faculty, the undergraduates, and the parents—could see the situation for what it is, and, so far as weak human nature permits, direct themselves accordingly.

The faculty, unfortunately, are not exempt from the circumstances of the age in America. If you prick a college professor he will show mediocrity as frequently as his fellow-Christian. But he has this advantage—his profession must bear the brunt of the struggle to attain that comfortable average of intelligence which the American experiment demands. His profession must also sweat and toil to train the leaders without which that experiment must fail. If responsibility breeds strength, then he cannot remain mediocre. But it is not of his occasional mediocrity that I complain; it is of his frequent and unnecessary lack of vision, his failure to see that both of these ends must be sought. As a class, the teaching profession is most reprehensible for the first of the two errors of democracy that I have discussed in this essay—the failure to encourage the exceptional man.

## COLLEGE SONS AND COLLEGE FATHERS

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Those faculty meetings whose rumblings echoed in our undergraduate world present to the philosophic mind a spectacle of earnest scholars anguishing through precious evening hours over Reilley's deficiencies in history, or the hopeless befuddlement of Jenkinson in the presence of untranslated French. The capable undergraduate who is doing his work, and beginning to profit by his education, has little place in their deliberations which, to paraphrase Dogberry, seem often to have for text, "If a man can learn, let him alone lest he learn more; but if he can learn nothing, let him be taught." And yet beneath this haze of cross-purposes there lies, as I have tried to show, an intuitive perception of a great service. They have pledged themselves, these scholars, to the democracy, and nobly, if sometimes blindly, they are laboring in its behalf. When their vision clears they will spend not more, perhaps, but certainly as much energy upon the intellectually predestined as upon the mentally unregenerate in the American colleges.

The undergraduate and his parents are guilty under the second count of the general indictment. They cater to mediocrity. As I

## THE COLLEGES AND MEDIOCRITY

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talk to the loyal, energetic undergraduate outside of the class-room, where he is not afraid to be himself, and as I meet his parents in the course of every-day life, I am convinced that here again the difficulty is quite as much a defect of vision as the pressure of unescapable circumstance. If the undergraduate could see the situation as it is, what would happen? If he could see what the time spirit sees, that he has consented to be part of the dead-weight of crude Americanism, to be raised with infinite pains to an intellectual level only a little higher, where he may view the world only a little more broadly, with but a trifle more of truth! Would he be content with his part? I doubt it. For if there is one thing experience in an American university teaches it is this, that the undergraduate (who, after all, is a picked man, not the average of his race) is not so mediocre as he seems—is not nearly so mediocre as the education he seems to desire.

And the parents!—if they could glimpse what even the college sees: that when they send us their children with injunctions to think well, but not *too* well, they are bowing down to the leaden calf of mediocrity. If only they

## COLLEGE SONS AND COLLEGE FATHERS

could realize that their boys are held back by such influence, are caught, like the pilgrim with his burden of sin, fast in the sands of mediocrity! If they could know that the college which loves their sons and daughters fears them often enough, as counterweights in the slow uplift to which it is pledged! If they saw all this, would they be content with their part in American education? More than one encouraging experience makes me sure of the response.

And we need their aid—the aid of the parents and the aid of the undergraduates; for, until democracy reaches the level of its opportunities, or is proved a failure, the problem of mediocrity will continue to exist. We cannot solve it by educating the best men only. We cannot solve it by slighting the able. We cannot escape it by pretending that mediocrity is good enough. We must bear its burden. But as we push on toward a distant and uncertain victory a clearer sight of the path we have chosen would save us from stumbling blindly and stupidly beneath the weight.

## CURRENT LITERATURE AND THE COLLEGES

**N**OT long ago I saw a college professor drop into a chair at his club, glance over the table of contents of a well-known periodical, and fling it down in disgust.

"I can't read the magazines," he snorted. "What is the matter with American literature?"

In the trolley that night I sat next to a business man who was studying the pictures of the same monthly. "Do you read that magazine?" I asked.

"Part of it," he said, indifferently; "I suppose all of it is trash."

I cannot see that such critics have a right to ask, What is the matter with American literature? Superciliousness and indifference were never friends to criticism or to authors? The worst way to improve a national literature is not to read it; and the next is to read it badly.

## COLLEGE SONS AND COLLEGE FATHERS

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I bought the magazine, and read it, all but the advertisements. It was not great literature—some of it was not even good literature—but it was certainly not “trash.” A task in research once led me to read with thoroughness the magazines of the mid-nineteenth century, when English literature was, so the critics say, greater than now. They were not so good as this modern periodical—they were not nearly so good in average of content, even though here and there a poem or a story or an essay since become famous lightened the toil of reading. My professor, if he had lived in the mid-century, would never have grappled with the diffuse, sentimental writing that filled so many pages. He would have stopped with the table of contents, and missed perhaps a chapter of *Vanity Fair*, a sonnet of Longfellow’s, a story by Poe, or an instalment of *The Autocrat of the Breakfast Table*. And my Philistine business man would infallibly have skipped these good things, read the bad, and proclaimed that most modern stuff was trash.

What is it that makes us contemptuous when we come to current literature, and especially to current American literature? Is it

## CURRENT LITERATURE AND COLLEGES

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modesty? I doubt it. Is it hypocrisy? Do we sneer at our reading (for most of us *do* read the magazines, and with some interest, too) lest some learned critic or scornful foreigner will laugh at our taste? Or is it timidity because we lack confidence to discriminate between the good and the bad in current publications? Lowell said that there would never be an American literature until there was an American criticism. If he meant that there must be great critics before there are great writers, the history of many literary periods is against him. But it is certain that until we are ready to stand by our books and periodicals—to be honest in our praise and blame, and intelligent in our discrimination—American literature, in spite of an occasional achievement of distinction, must, as a whole, remain second-rate.

To sneer at contemporary literature, whether native or foreign, because most of it must disappear in the test and trial of time, is more than ridiculous—it is dangerous. Of the hundred short stories of the month, ninety poor ones are less important than a single paragraph from Fielding or Thackeray, and yet the ten remaining may mean more to us than all but the best



## COLLEGE SONS AND COLLEGE FATHERS

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works of earlier centuries. We are partners in the literary speculations of our own age—mere investors in the established enterprises of earlier periods. In the works of our best fictionists the speech is our speech, the mode of thought our mode, the clothes, the streets, the events, the philosophy, our clothes, our streets, our remembered history, our philosophy. If it is to the so-called “classics” that we must go for eternal human nature and perfection of expression tried and sure, it is in the “newest books,” in the newspaper on its way from the press to the kindling-box, in the supposedly ephemeral magazine, that we must seek a record of ourselves as others see us, and find the self-expression of our age. If literature is to be taken seriously at all, current literature is in some respects the most serious part of it—even the photo-play, even the comic supplement. It is like the breakers on the shore-front: the ocean lies behind, but it is in them that motion, energy, and life are concentrated and made manifest. Few take seriously our current literature, and that is why the bilious query of the supercilious and the indifferent, “What is the matter with American literature?” is so

## CURRENT LITERATURE AND COLLEGES

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irritating. It is because I, for one, do take it with enormous seriousness that I dare to ask the question myself.

That there really is something wrong—at least with current American writing—the evidence proves only too readily. A comparison of American stories, articles, plays, poetry, with the product of Europe need not inspire a native reader with the despair that English critics profess to feel for us. Our writers are the cleverest in the world, barring only the French; and, in their special field of fiction and journalism, the most skilful and most vigorous. They have energy, versatility, promise, and for the most part are free from the marks of decadence visible in English paradox and French morbidity. But depth, truth, sincerity, are not so evident; nor is the craftsmanship which completes a perfect work. The best foreign plays are better made than our best native drama. The best English fiction strikes deeper, means more, is truer, than what we are accustomed to put forward as our most representative work, although one must except three or four of our chief writers if the scale is to tip against us. English poetry, on the whole, is more

## COLLEGE SONS AND COLLEGE FATHERS

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vital, more beautiful, more perfect than ours. And the cultivated American reader not only recognizes these differences, he exaggerates them. The journalistic humor that he laughs at he believes to be cheap, even when it is not—unless, like Mark Twain's, it comes in book form with its prestige stamped on the cover. Short stories more clever than anything being written in England he delights in, but does not wholly admire. Plays that hold his interest he damns with a "good melodrama, I suppose," at the end; and he calls the best sellers "virile," "wholesome," "stirring," or "sweet," without supposing for an instant that they are true. Current literature may tickle the current American reader, and it often plays successfully upon his emotions and his sentiment; but like current religion, it seldom stirs him to faith. Its roots are not about his mind and his heart.

There are two extremes, both well-marked, in American literature—the strenuous and the delicate. Between them is to be found that writing of the first order which, in despite of critical sneerers, we have for a century been producing, and the mass of featureless publica-

## CURRENT LITERATURE AND COLLEGES !

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tion which has neither form, content, nor significance. The bulk of our circulating library and news-stand literature belongs to the first extreme—that which I have called the “strenuous” order. It is loud-voiced, aggressive, marvelously lush in its growth, and loved of the multitude. In articles and editorials it affects the positive and the picturesque. It deals in paragraphs of three lines’ length; and its subject-matter, while interesting, has little accuracy and a minimum of thoughtfulness. In fiction, it acquires such head-lines as “A Virile American Conquers the Love of a Beautiful Balkan Princess, and Wins Her by a Method which must be Read to be Appreciated.” Its stories are built like cantilever bridges, and their construction is quite as evident. The characters are like the clothes they wear in the illustrations—ready-made; and the advertising pages, devoted to the ideal American as he dresses in New York, present them quite as fittingly as the picture in color on the cover. Sometimes the theme is adventure, in which case the pace is rapid beyond hope of realization in this jaded world; sometimes it is business, and then we learn how luridly

## COLLEGE SONS AND COLLEGE FATHERS

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romantic are the lives of our bankers and brokers; sometimes it is pathos—then the tears are never far from the surface, and the honest American heart, be it never so practical, is touched, or your money back; sometimes it is humor, and this time, as the quotation from the press notice describes it, “you roll in excruciating delight upon the library rug, and only save yourself by herculean self-control from falling into the fireplace.”

I do not intend to be sarcastic. On the contrary, one must admire the abounding vitality of this literature of the democracy. It may not be “virile,” but it certainly is vigorous. It may not be “literary,” but what remains when you skip the “dramatic openings,” the “happy endings,” with “uplifts,” the mere adventures, and the conventional characterizations—what is left after this contains much real literature, in which American conditions are mirrored with humor and with genuineness, and with a shrewdness that almost makes up for depth. The magazine that advertises, “This is the best number ever published in America,” may be as disappointing as certain “boosted” towns of the West,

## CURRENT LITERATURE AND COLLEGES

but it is likely to contain passages that really do depict America; and this is something that the merely "literary" may never accomplish.

In fact, the strenuous, extravagant, aggressive school of American literature—the popular school—is as full of strength and confidence and promise for the future as American business. But it is far cruder than American business. It has less brains behind it. It is a plant that runs to vigorous stems and over-abundant leaves. It is lush in growth and not highly productive of valuable fruit, because as yet it is deficient in roots.

The strenuous school is certainly preferable, however, to the other extreme—the delicate, scented variety of writing, which, though not hardy in our practical America, is replanted annually in astonishing abundance. This is a flower of art that the multitude who make popularity are ignorant of, and yet it, too, is typically American. In occasional contributions to the general magazines, in a hundred "paid-for-by-the-author" books, and in thousands of essays, stories, and poems read before clubs or printed for the few, there is a gentle, highly personal, highly polished style of

## COLLEGE SONS AND COLLEGE FATHERS

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composition which, if not literature, is certainly literary. People with no story to tell write it excellently and call it art; people with nothing to say polish their style and call it literature. As if by some survival of the curse of Babel, careful writing, discrimination in words, restraint, grace, beauty—all that goes to make a style—have become associated in America with the privately printed or the sparingly read.

It would be invidious and merely confusing to single out examples. The kind of writing I have in mind is not restricted to individuals, nor to given essays or stories. It is a tendency rather than a method, and shows its empty, graceful head as unmistakably when the commercial writer turns the spot-light upon his purple patches, or breathes soft sentiment, as in the labored mannerisms of the cultured dilettante. Nevertheless, there is an astonishing production of American work whose only recommendation is its literary form, though it is not literature in substance. In poetry, especially, the vice is prevalent; in truth, there seem to be as many poets as there are readers of new poetry; and a discouraging percentage

## CURRENT LITERATURE AND COLLEGES

of their verse is mere graceful flower and leaf. The scribbling-itch, of course, is common to all nations; but the depressing factor here is that so much of what is really well written, artistically written, so much of the thoroughly civilized writing in our current literature, is of this fragile order; so much of what has real juice in it, real promise—fresh thought, keen observation, cogent truth—is slipshod, vulgar, ugly, or warped by sensationalism and the fear of reality into a sentimental or exaggerated imitation of what the public is supposed to consider life. The one school runs to lush and wasteful growth, because it sends no roots down into the heart of America. The other, for all its grace and perfect form, is not hardy, is not at home among us, because it, too, is not well rooted in our soil.

No one will deny that we lose by this; those least who know and admire the work of the many American writers who, in the face of discouraging conditions, are earning more discriminating praise than has yet been given them. Only the supercilious can fail to regret the vigorous imagination running waste in our “popular” productions—so little of it directed



## COLLEGE SONS AND COLLEGE FATHERS

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to any end that may serve art and truth. Only the indifferent can see without regret that the study of perfection which leads to art is bestowed chiefly upon subjects that contain little promise and no hearty life. Let us take from the comparison the few writers of whom we may well boast; let us confine ourselves to pure literature; and then admit that in the drama, in fiction, and in poetry we are just neither to our talents, to our needs, nor to our desires in literature.

Excuses are as plentiful as blackberries—and, to a critic with some national pride, as sour. The commonest of them take the form of that ogre which lurks in all the dreams of culture—commercialism. It is a fallacy. Venice was commercial and had Giorgione and Titian. The Florence of Boccaccio was the center of fourteenth-century commercialism. The Holland of Rembrandt was commercial to the core. There is sure to be a vast output of low-grade literary ware when, as with us, the vast majority of readers are money-makers necessarily intent on their gains, and deprived of the leisure necessary to form a taste; exactly as there is an enormous production of the common con-

## CURRENT LITERATURE AND COLLEGES

veniences of life—shoes, newspapers, collars, and phonographs. But this is no necessary deterrent to high-grade work. The more money the more chance for the artist with high ideals to live. Surely our industrial development since the Civil War has brought us to the level of old New England of seventy years ago, when the exploitation of the seaboard states had ended in an accumulation of wealth, and a freeing of time and energy for our one great literary period. Commercialism may be a proffered excuse, but it certainly is not a necessary cause of our mediocrity in literature.

America is too heterogeneous, too shifting, for mature literature, say others; it is so various in blood, so transitional in its civilization, as to offer few subjects for finished work. This is the critic's excuse. The thousands of writers who are satisfying the growing clamor for "something to read" do not present it. They are not troubled by lack of subjects, nor are they confused by the complexity and movement of our national life. It is true that they do not seem to get to the heart of this life; and it may be that they rush in where the wiser and less vigorous fear to tread. But what arrant

## COLLEGE SONS AND COLLEGE FATHERS

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nonsense it would be to hold off until New York and Chicago and the Pacific coast are "finished"—as an Englishwoman put it, asserting that they would be worth looking at when that time came. The scientist nowadays does not wait for his specimen to be full grown or dead before he begins his examination. Nor should we. There is no greater lack of homogeneity among races here than among classes in Germany. There is as much significance in our mental and material development as in English pessimism or Russian melancholy. I admit the difficulty of making literature from towns that change their populations as they change their pavements, and a country still largely unassimilated. But if we lose one way, we gain another. Forests and mountain wildernesses, emigration and immigration, the clash of racial habits and ideals in an amalgamating society; industrial, moral, social transformation—these are assuredly subjects for literature; and that they challenge originality and the interpretative imagination does not make them less interesting. And yet American literature does not live up to its opportunities. It is not so good as American machinery. And the

## CURRENT LITERATURE AND COLLEGES

trouble is neither commercialism nor a dearth of subjects; it is a lack of proper soil. It is the fault of the soil that our novels, plays, poetry, articles—unrefined and over-refined—lack the roots which would make them better literature.

The soil from which good books grow is intelligence. Our current writing is clever, it is shrewd, and it is not wanting in imagination; but, with due and grateful exception, it comes short in the meditated experience and thoughtful observation that spring from intelligence. Its art is less bracing, less vital, than the best in our lives. Galsworthy, Wells, and Bennett are better novelists than any group of Americans; Shaw, Synge, and Barrie are better dramatists; Masfield and William Watson are better poets—not, I think, because they have more brains, more art, more imagination, but because they use more. They strike deeper, perhaps because it is easier to do so in old soil, but also because deeper striking is required of them.

The deficiency, however, is not, I believe, primarily with the writers. By all the laws of probability, we should have more than our

## COLLEGE SONS AND COLLEGE FATHERS

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share of literary genius. The American has shown himself more fertile in literary talent than in any other of the arts; and, furthermore, wave after wave of restless intellect has moved with successive immigrations across the sea to us. One of the great Welsh poets, says George Borrow, died in New Brunswick in North America. If the soil had been right, Henry James, Whistler, Sargent—to look at the matter differently—would have flourished here. If the soil were right, there would be genius to grow here.

What we chiefly lack is intelligent readers. Good readers make good soil. No actor can act his best to a cold audience or an empty house. Nor can a writer write his best when there are none or few who will hear him. It is true that there have been independent geniuses, such as Browning and Shelley, who seem to have defied the neglect of the reader. If we could call forth such men, might we not make an American literature, regardless of what America wants? Unfortunately, rare spirits like theirs do not come at call; and even they are not entirely independent of the circumstances in which they must write. Shelley,

## CURRENT LITERATURE AND COLLEGES

it is true, did his best work for an audience that was few as well as fit; but then his best work is the purest of lyric poetry, the most personal form of literature, the least dependent upon a circle of readers. As for Browning, his isolation was a prime cause of his obscurity when, as so often, he was needlessly obscure. Great writers do not come ready-made. Good readers help to make them.

We are the greatest readers among the nations. Everybody in America reads—from the messenger-boy to the corporation president. It never was so easy to read as now in America. A journey is measured by discarded newspapers and magazines. Fifteen minutes on a trolley-car without something to read has become a horror. We read so much that the publishers, who do not expect us to think of what we are reading, crowd their books and magazines with illustrations in order to save us from embarrassment. This hunger and thirst for the printed page has resulted in a flood of writing that is good, but not too good; clever, but not too witty; emphatic, but not too serious, lest the unintelligent reader be confused, lest the intelligent reader have to

## COLLEGE SONS AND COLLEGE FATHERS

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waste his reading-time in thinking. A year of such indiscriminate perusing, and a man of good natural taste will swallow anything rather than be left without something to read. And we have been doing it for a generation!

Hence it has come about that, while we are the greatest readers in the world, we are also the worst. We read too much to read intelligently. We are bad readers, some of us, because, like Benedick, we have "a contemptible spirit" for the books we spend our time over; but most of us because, if we have intelligence, we fail to use it when we read. If as great an exercise of sheer brain power were demanded from our novelists and our playwrights as from our engineers, superintendents, architects, and lawyers, a real literature would follow. But we cannot stop reading long enough to make such a demand. We have no time for a great creative literature. "People want to be made happy by their novels. They don't care about truth." "Any old stuff in a play will please the public, if there are laughs enough." So long as this can be said of the intelligent, educated men and women who determine true popularity, good writing in America will come

## CURRENT LITERATURE AND COLLEGES

only by accident. We are bad readers; and that is what is the matter with American literature.

I do not mean to excuse either author or publisher. The author—so many think—underestimates the quality of his audience. Like Oliver Wendell Holmes, he does not dare to be as funny as he can. Often he is unwilling, often unable to pass the mark of “good enough.” The publisher is certainly over-timorous, and much prefers the rear to the van of progressing taste. Nevertheless, the root of the difficulty lies elsewhere. Supply in literature may not be created, but it is inevitably conditioned, by demand.

In the past a variety of circumstances, social and economic rather than intellectual, have made the American voracious and superficial in his reading. And this is true to-day, with the addition that France, England, and Germany are threatened by the same evil. There is only one remedy—education. How else can you prepare for intelligence? Education in the broadest sense makes a good reader. In one of its departments—knowledge of life, shrewdness, common sense—we Americans are



## COLLEGE SONS AND COLLEGE FATHERS

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abundantly competent to read. It seems that in another department—the will to think, to interpret, to appreciate—we lag behind. Our colleges are blamed for their failure to turn out the authors of a great American literature. The charge is unjust, for not the most Utopian of universities could produce a great literature before it was wanted. Let them be blamed rather for their failure to produce good readers. Great writers they can, at best, train and encourage. Good readers they can make.

In our society it is the college graduates who must make the soil for literature. Thanks to sheer numbers, they will form, in the generation now under way, the majority of those who by competence or opportunity become readers of good writing; they will determine the policy of the better newspapers, the quality of the best magazines, the success of most books worthy of consideration. Are they reading better books than men and women who have never been to college? Are they asking that their fiction shall be truer, their plays more dramatic, their wit wittier, their articles more intelligent, than all that is purveyed for those without a degree? In some measure, yes, espe-

## CURRENT LITERATURE AND COLLEGES

cially among the women; in the proper measure, emphatically no. And the reason is that the college graduate was too busy with other things to acquire intellectual interests in college.

The undergraduate of to-day is certainly possessed of a reasonable amount of intelligence; the criticism most justly made is that in intellectual matters he often fails to use it. It is easy to present him with information, and get it—not seriously damaged—back again. It is not difficult to make him comprehend theories, developments, conclusions, ideas. But it is hard to make him think. He will spend enormous sums on tutoring; he will memorize whole pages; sometimes he will even forego his degree, rather than think. And as good reading demands a certain amount of thinking as a prime requisite, his books suffer in proportion to the laziness of his mind. If he enters business in after life, this defect in thoroughness is remedied by a stern necessity, and what intelligence has accrued to him he rapidly puts to work at full efficiency. In preparation for law and the professions generally, he passes through a period of higher training when thinking is forced upon him. . . But when it comes to

## COLLEGE SONS AND COLLEGE FATHERS

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reading for pleasure, there is no such compulsion. If he was lazy-minded in studying in college, he will be lazier in reading afterward. If he was content with a sixty-per-cent. efficiency, he will scarcely seek a higher ratio of appreciation when there is only his own pleasure to consult. And how can a considerable literature—how can a really first-rate newspaper—be run for a man who does not care to comprehend more than, say, sixty per cent.!

It is not a duty I am urging. I suppose that we have a moral obligation to become better readers, but such an argument is quite unnecessary. If, crossing the hotel corridor to the man who is reading a novelized photoplay to rest his mind, I should say, "Dear sir, ought you not to be reading good literature?" I should expect the retort that Francis Thompson made upon the shoemaker who asked if he were saved. I have neither the right nor the desire to put such a question. I am more concerned with the pleasure and inspiration that the man in the hotel corridor, and his hundred thousand companions, are losing. What stories the really able American authors might write for him, if he were sufficiently

## CURRENT LITERATURE AND COLLEGES

interested in life to read them! What plays they would produce, if he would take the trouble to discriminate between drama and melodrama; between sentiment and sentimentality; between wit and horseplay! What essays they would compose if they believed he could be interested by thought! If he would but spend upon current literature the loose change of his intellectual efforts, America might see the beginnings of a literary boom that even a California real-estate man would treat with respect.

And, I repeat, I do not know where this is to begin if not in the colleges—unless, indeed, it is to begin in the schools and the homes that send us an undergraduate already predisposed to regard matter as more important than mind. Every modern nation has depended upon its schools and universities—not, it is true, to create literature, for genius has never required a degree, but to spread that intelligence, and still more that interest in intelligence, by whose warmth good books ripen into literature. The closer one looks at apparent exceptions—Elizabethan England, Italy of the Renaissance, Russia of the nineteenth century—the more

## COLLEGE SONS AND COLLEGE FATHERS

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clearly one sees that they are not exceptions, but merely confirm the rule. We shall get a distinctive literature when we are willing to appreciate one. We shall be willing and able to appreciate one when our education arouses intellectual interests as well as trains character and disciplines the mind. And this will happen when, among other things, boys and girls are sent to college to become intelligent.

I shall probably be scoffed at by the professional writer who has learned his trade in the school of experience, and condemned by the esthete who is more interested in culture than in life. The one will laugh at the idea that upon education can depend so unacademic a thing as creative literature. The other is too contemptuous of the masses to believe that our artistic welfare is bound up with theirs. But the facts are against them. The lack of art which foreign critics urge against our professional literature is due, in part at least, to the lack of an audience that will demand it. The lack of vitality which is evident in our merely literary compositions is the result of writing for the sake of writing, in despite of those who will not read. No author is independent of

## CURRENT LITERATURE AND COLLEGES

his readers. He can distance them, but he cannot escape their influence. The novelist or dramatist who is urged to disregard popularity is quite right if he hesitates, and most excusable if, in making the attempt, he falters or fails. I have no formula for genius. But when we have good readers, we shall get that American literature of which now we have no less and no more than we deserve.

## WRITING ENGLISH

“**D**EEDS, not words,” is a platitude—a flat statement which reduces the facts of the case to an average, and calls that truth. It is absurd to imply, as does this old truism, that we may never judge a man by his words. Words are often the most convenient indices of education, of cultivation, and of intellectual power. And what is more, a man’s speech, a man’s writing, when properly interpreted, may sometimes measure the potentialities of the mind more thoroughly, more accurately, than the deeds that environment, opportunity, luck permit. It is hard enough to take the intellectual measure even of the makers of history, if we judge by their acts, so rapidly does the apparent value of their accomplishments vary with changing conceptions of what is and what is not worth doing. It is infinitely more difficult to judge in advance of youths

## WRITING ENGLISH

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just going out into the world by what they do. Their words, which reveal what they are thinking, and how they are thinking, give almost the only vision of their minds, and "by their words ye shall know them" becomes not a perversion, but an adaptation of the old text. Would you judge of a boy just graduated entirely by the acts he had performed in college? If you did you would make some profound and illuminating mistakes.

This explains, I think, why parents and teachers and college presidents, and even undergraduates, are exercised over the study of writing English—which is, after all, just the study of the proper putting together of words. They may believe, all of them, that their concern is merely for the tangible rewards of the power to write well—the ability to compose a good letter, to speak forcibly on occasion, to offer the amount of literacy required for most "jobs." But I wonder if the quite surprising keenness of their interest is not due to another cause. I wonder if they do not feel—perhaps unconsciously—that words indicate the man; that the power to write well shows intellect, and measures, if not its profundity, at least the



## COLLEGE SONS AND COLLEGE FATHERS

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stage of its development. We fasten on the defects of the letters written by undergraduates, on their faltering speeches, on their confused examination papers, as something significant, ominous, worthy even of comment in the press. And we are, I believe, perfectly right. Speech and writing, if you get them in fair samples, indicate the extent and the value of a college education far better than a degree.

It is this conviction that, pressing upon the schools and colleges, has caused such a flood of courses and text-books, such an expenditure of time, energy, and money in the teaching of composition, so many ardent hopes of accomplishment, so much bitter disappointment at relative failure. I do not know how many are directly or indirectly teaching the writing of English in America—perhaps some tens of thousands; the imagination falters at the thought of how many are trying to learn it. Thus the parent, conscious of this enormous endeavor and the convictions that inspire it, is somewhat appalled to hear the critics without the colleges maintaining that we are not teaching good writing, and the critics within protesting that good writing cannot be taught!

## WRITING ENGLISH

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It is with the teachers, the administrators, the theorists on education, but most of all the teachers, that the responsibility for the alleged failure of this great project—to endow the college graduate with adequate powers of expression—must be sought. But these guardians of expression are divided into many groups, of which four are chief.

There is first the great party of the Know-Nothings, who plan and teach with no opinion whatsoever as to the ends of their teaching. Under the conditions of human nature and current financial rewards for the work, this party is inevitably large; but it counts for nothing except inertia. There is next the respectable and efficient cohort of the Do-Nothings, who believe that good writing and speaking are natural emanations from culture, as health from exercise, or clouds from the sea. They would cultivate the mind of the undergraduate, and let expression take care of itself. They do not believe in teaching English composition. Next are the Formalists, who hold up a dictionary in one hand, the rules of rhetoric in another, and say, learn these, and good writing and good speaking shall be

## COLLEGE SONS AND COLLEGE FATHERS

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added unto you. The Formalists have weakened in late years. There have been desertions to the Do-Nothings, for the work of grinding rules into unwilling minds is hard, and it is far easier to adopt a policy of *laissez-faire*. But there have been far more desertions into a party which I shall call, for want of a better name, the Optimists. The Optimists believe that in teaching to write and speak the American college is accepting its most significant if not its greatest duty. They believe that we must understand what causes good writing, in order to teach it; and that for the average undergraduate writing must be taught.

The best way to approach this grand battleground of educational policies is by the very practical fashion of pretending (if pretence is necessary) that you have a son (or a daughter) ready for college. What does he need, what must he have in a writing way, in a speaking way, when he has passed through all the education you see fit to give him? What should he possess of such ability to satisfy the world and himself? Facts, ideas, and imagination, to put it roughly, make up the substance of expression. Facts he must be able to present

clearly and faithfully; ideas he must be able to present clearly and comprehensively; his imagination he will need to express when his nature demands it. And for all these needs he must be able to use knowingly the words that study and experience will feed to him. He must be able to combine these words effectively in order to express the thoughts of which he is capable. And these thoughts he must work out along lines of logical, reasonable development, so that what he says or writes will have an end and attain it. In addition, if he is imaginative—and who is not—he should know the color and fire of words, the power of rhythm and harmony over the emotions, the qualities of speech whose secret will enable him to mold language to his personality and perhaps achieve a style. This he should know; the other powers he must have, or stop short of his full efficiency.

Alas, we all know that the undergraduate, in the mass, fails often to attain even to the power of logical, accurate statement, whether of facts or ideas. It is true that most of the charges against him are to a greater or less degree irrelevant. Weighty indictments of his

## COLLEGE SONS AND COLLEGE FATHERS

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powers of expression are based upon bad spelling: a sign, it is true, of slovenliness, an indication of a lack of thoroughness that goes deeper than the misplacing of letters, but not in itself a proof of inability to express. Great writers have often misspelled; and the letters our capable business men write when the stenographer fails to come back after lunch are by no means impeccable. Other accusations refer to a childish vagueness of expression—due to the fact that the American undergraduate is often a child intellectually rather than to any defects in composition *per se*. But it is a waste of time to deny that he writes, if not badly, at least not so clearly, so correctly, so intelligently as we expect. The question is, why?

It would be a comfort to place all the blame on the schools; and indeed they must take some blame, not only because they deserve it, but also to enlighten those critics of the college who never consider the kind of grain which comes into our hoppers. The readers of college entrance papers could tell a mournful story of how the candidates for our Freshmen classes write. Here, for an instance, is a paragraph in-

## WRITING ENGLISH

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tended to prove that the writer had a command of simple English, correct in sentence structure, spelling, capitalization, and punctuation. The subject is "The Value of Organized Athletics in Schools"; not an abstruse one, or too academic:

If fellows are out in the open and take athletics say at a certain time every-day; These fellows are in good health and allert in their lessons. while those who take no exercise are logy and soft. Or-  
ginized athletics in a school bring the former, while if a school has no athletics every-thing goes more or less slipshod, and the fellows are more liable to get into trouble, because they are nervious from having nothing to do.

This is a little below the average of the papers rejected for entrance to college. It is not a fair sample of what the schools can do; but it is a very fair sample of what they often do not do. It was not written by a foreigner, nor, I judge, by a son of illiterate parents, since it came from an expensive Eastern preparatory school. The reader, marking with some heat a failure for the essay from which this paragraph is extracted, would not complain of the writer's paucity of ideas. His ideas are not below the

## COLLEGE SONS AND COLLEGE FATHERS

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average of his age. He would keep his wrath for the broken, distorted sentences, the silly spelling, the lack (which would appear in the whole composition) of even a rudimentary construction to carry the thought. Spelling, the fundamentals of punctuation, and the compacting of a sentence must be taught in the schools, or it is too late. It is too late to cure diseases of these members in college. They can be abated; but again and again they will break out. It is the school's business to teach them; and the weary reader sees in this unhappy specimen but a dark and definite manifestation of a widespread slovenliness in secondary education; a lack of thoroughness which appears not only in the failures, but also, though in less measure, among the better writers, whose work is too good in other respects not to be reluctantly passed.

Again, it would be easy to place the blame for much of the slipshod writing of the undergraduate upon the standards set by the grown-ups outside the colleges. Editors can tell of the endless editing that contributions, even from writers supposed to be professional, will sometimes require. And when such a sentence

## WRITING ENGLISH

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as the following slips through, and begins an article in a well-known, highly respectable magazine, we can only say, "If gold rust, what will iron do?"

Yes the Rot—and with a very big R—in sport: for that, thanks to an overdone and too belauded a Professionalism by a large section of the pandering press, is what it has got to.

Again, any business man could produce from his files a collection of letters full of phrasing so vague and inconsequential that only his business instincts and knowledge of the situation enabled him to interpret it. Any lawyer could give numberless instances where an inability to write clear and simple English has caused litigation without end. Indeed, the bar is largely supported by errors in English composition! And as for conversation, conducted, I will not say with pedantical correctness, for that is not an ideal, but with accuracy and transparency of thought—listen to the talk about you!

However, it is the business of the colleges to improve all that; and though it is not easy to develop in youth virtues which are more



## COLLEGE SONS AND COLLEGE FATHERS

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admired than practised by maturity, let us assume that they should succeed in turning out writers of satisfactory ability, even with these handicaps, and look deeper for the cause of their relative failure.

The chief cause of the prevalent inadequacy of expression among our undergraduates is patent, and its effects are by no means limited to America, as complaints from France and from England prove. The mob—the many-headed, the many-mouthed, figured in the past by poets as dumb, or, at best, as an incoherent thing of brutish noises signifying speech—is acquiring education and learning how to express it. Hundreds of thousands whose ancestors never read, and seldom talked except of the simpler needs of life, are doing the talking and the writing that their larger share in the transaction of the world's business demands. Indeed, democracy requires not only that the illiterate shall learn to read and write in the narrower sense of the words, but also that the relatively literate shall seek with their growing intellectuality a more perfect power of expression. And it is precisely from the classes only relatively literate—those for whom in the past there has

## WRITING ENGLISH

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been no opportunity, and no need, to become highly educated—that the bulk of our college students to-day are coming, the bulk of the students in the endowed institutions of the East as well as in the newer state universities of the West. The typical undergraduate is no longer the son of a lawyer or a clergyman with an intellectual background.

There is plenty of grumbling among college faculties, and in certain newspapers, over this state of affairs. In reality, of course, it is the opportunity of the American colleges. Let the motives be what they may, the simple fact that so many American parents wish to give their children more education than they themselves were blessed with is a condition so favorable for those who believe that in the long run only intelligence can keep our civilization on the path of real progress, that one expects to hear congratulations instead of wails from the college campuses.

Nevertheless, we pay for our opportunity, and we must expect to pay. The thousands of intellectual immigrants, ill-supplied with means of progress, indefinite of aim, unaware of their opportunities, who land every September at

## COLLEGE SONS AND COLLEGE FATHERS

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the college gates, constitute a weighty burden, a terrible responsibility. And the burden rests upon no one with more crushing weight than upon the unfortunate teacher of composition. That these entering immigrants cannot write well is a symptom of their mental rawness. It is to be expected. But thanks to the methods of slipshod, ambitious America, the schools have passed them on still shaky in the first steps of accurate writing—spelling, punctuation, sentence structure, and the use of words. Thanks to the failure of America to demand thoroughness in anything but athletics and business, they are blind to the need of thoroughness in expression. And thanks to the inescapable difficulty of accurate writing, they resist the attempt to make them thorough, with the youthful mind's instinctive rebellion against work. Nevertheless, whatever the cost, they must learn if they are to become educated in any practical and efficient sense; the immigrants especially must learn, since they come from environments where accurate expression has not been practised—often has not been needed—and go to a future where it will be required of them. Not even the Do-Nothing

school denies the necessity that the undergraduate should learn to write well. But how?

The Know-Nothing school proposes no ultimate solution, and knows none, unless faithfully teaching what it is told to teach, and accepting the sweat and burden of the day, with few of its rewards, be not in its blind way a better solution than to dodge the responsibility altogether.

The Formalists labor over precept and principle—disciplining, commanding, threatening—feeling more grief over one letter lost, or one comma mishandled, than joy over the most spirited of incorrect effusions. They turn out sulky youths who nevertheless have learned something.

The Do-Nothings propose a solution that is engaging, logical—and insufficient. They are the philosophers and the esthetes among teachers, who see, what the Formalists miss, that he who thinks well will in the long run write as he should. Their especial horror is of the compulsory theme, extracted from unwilling and idealess minds. Their remedy for all ills of speech and pen is: teach, not writing and speaking, but thinking; give, not rules and

## COLLEGE SONS AND COLLEGE FATHERS

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principles, but materials for thought. And above all, do not force college students to study composition. The Do-Nothing school has almost enough truth on its side to be right. It has more truth, in fact, than its principles permit it to make use of.

The umpire in this contest—who is the parent with a son ready for college—should note, however, two pervading fallacies in this *laissez-faire* theory of writing English. The first belongs to the party of the right among the Do-Nothings—the older teachers who come from the generation that sent only picked men to college; the second to the party of the left—the younger men who are distressed by the toil, the waste, the stupidity that accompany so much work in composition.

The older men attack the attempt to teach boys to make literature. Their hatred of the cheap, the banal, and the false in literature that has been machine-made by men who have learned to express finely what is not worth expressing at all, leads them to distrust the teaching of English composition. They condemn, however, a method of teaching that long since withered under their scorn. The

## WRITING ENGLISH

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aim of the college course in composition to-day is not the making of literature, but writing; not the production of imaginative masterpieces, but the orderly arrangement of thought in words. Through no foresight of our own, but thanks to the pressure of our immigrants upon us, we have ceased teaching "eloquence" and "rhetoric," and have taken upon ourselves the humbler task of helping the thinking mind to find words and a form of expression as quickly, as easily, above all as simply, as possible. The old teacher of rhetoric aspired to make Burkes, Popes, or De Quinceys. We are content if our students become the masters rather than the servants of their prose.

The party of the left presents a more frontal attack upon the teaching of the writing of English. Show the undergraduate how to think, they say; fill his mind with knowledge, and his pen will find the way. Ah, but there is the fallacy! Why not help him to find the way—as in Latin, or surveying, or English literature. The way in composition can be taught, as in these other subjects. Writing, like skating, or sailing a ship, has its especial methods, its especial technique, even as it has its especial medium,

## COLLEGE SONS AND COLLEGE FATHERS

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words, and the larger unities of expression. The laws that govern it are simple. They are always in intimate connection with the thought behind, and worthless without it, but they can be taught. Ask any effective teacher of composition to show you what he has done time and again for the Freshmen whose sprawling thought he has helped to form into coherent and unified expression. And do not be deceived by analogies drawn from our colleges of the mid-nineteenth century, where composition was not taught, and men wrote well; or from the English universities, where the same conditions are said (with dissenting voices) to exist. In the first place, they had no immigrant problem in the mid-century, nor have in Oxford and Cambridge. In the second, the rigorous translation back and forward between the classics and the mother-tongue, now obsolete in America, but still a requisite for an English university training, provides a drill in accuracy of language whose efficiency is not to be despised.

The student must express his intellectual gains even as he absorbs them, or the crystallization of knowledge into personal thought will be checked at the beginning. The boy

## WRITING ENGLISH

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must be able to say what he knows, or write what he knows, or he does not know it. And it is as important to help him express as to help him absorb. The teachers in other departments must aid in this task or we fail; but where the whole duty of making expression keep pace with thought and with life is given to them, they will be forced either to overload or to neglect all but the little arcs that bound their subjects. And since they are specialists in other fields, and so neglect that technique of writing which in itself is a special study, their task, when they accept it, is hard, and their labor, when it is forced upon them, too often ineffective. Composition must be taught where college education proceeds—that is the truth of the matter; and if not taught directly, then indirectly, with pain and with waste.

The school of the Optimists approaches this question of writing English with self-criticism and with a full realization of the difficulties, and of the tentative nature of the methods now in use, but with confidence as to the possibility of ultimate success. In order to be an Optimist in composition you must have some stirrings of democracy in



## COLLEGE SONS AND COLLEGE FATHERS

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your veins. You must be interested in the need of the average man to shape his writing into a useful tool that will serve his purposes, whether in the ministry or the soap business. This is the utilitarian end of writing English. And you must be interested in developing his powers of self-expression, even when convinced that no great soul is longing for utterance, but only a commonplace human mind—like your own—that will be eased by powers of writing and of speech. It is here that composition is of service to the imagination, and incidentally to culture; and I should speak more largely of this latter service if there were space in this essay to bring forward all the aspects of college composition. It is the personal end of writing English. If the average man turns out to be a superman with mighty purposes ahead, or if he *has* a great soul seeking utterance, he will have far less need of your assistance; but you can aid him, nevertheless, and your aid will count as never before, and will be your greatest personal reward, though no greater service to the community, perhaps, than the countless hours spent upon the minds of the multitude.

## WRITING ENGLISH

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In order to be an Optimist it is still more important for you to understand that writing English well depends first upon intellectual grasp, and second upon technical skill, and always upon both. As for the first, your boy, if you are the parent of an undergraduate, is undergoing a curious experience in college. Against his head a dozen teachers are discharging round after round of information. Sometimes they miss; sometimes the shots glance off; sometimes the charge sinks in. And his brain is undergoing less obvious assaults. He is like the core of soft iron in an electro-magnet upon which invisible influences are constantly beating. His teachers are harassing his mind not only with facts, but also with methods of thinking: the historical method; the experimental method of science; the interpretative method of literature. Unfortunately, the charges of information too often lodge higgledy-piggledy, like bird-shot in a sign-board; and the waves of influence make an impression which is too often incoherent and confused. If the historians really taught the youth to think historically from the beginning and the scientists really taught him to think scientifically

## COLLEGE SONS AND COLLEGE FATHERS

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from the beginning, and he could apply his new methods of thought to the expression of his own emotions, experiences, life, then the teacher of composition might confine himself to the second of his duties, and teach only that technique which makes writing to uncoil itself as easily and as vividly as a necklace of matched and harmonious stones. In the University of Utopia we shall leave the organization of thought to the other departments, and have plenty left to do; but we are not yet in Utopia.

At present, the teacher of composition stands like a sentry at the gates of knowledge, challenging all who come out speaking random words and thoughts, asking: "Have you thought it out?" "Have you thought it out clearly?" "Can you put your conclusions into adequate words?" And if the answers are unsatisfactory, he must proceed to teach that orderly, logical development of thought from cause to effect which underlies all provinces of knowledge, and reaches well into the unmapped territories of the imagination. But even in Utopia composition must remain the testing-ground of education, though we shall hope for more satisfactory answers to our challenges.

## WRITING ENGLISH

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And even in Utopia, where the undergraduate will perfect his thinking while acquiring his facts, it will be the duty of the teacher of writing to help him to apply his intellectual powers to his experiences, his emotions, his imagination—in short, to self-expression. And there will still remain the technique of writing.

Theoretically, when the undergraduate has assembled his thoughts he is ready and competent to write them, but practically he is neither entirely ready nor usually entirely competent. It is one thing to assemble an automobile; it is another thing to run it. The technique of writing is not nearly so interesting as the subject and the thought in writing; just as the method of riding a horse is not nearly so interesting as the ride itself. And yet when you consider it as a means to an end, as a subtle, elastic, and infinitely useful craft, the method of writing is not uninteresting even to those who have to learn and not to teach it. The technique of composition has to do with words. We are most of us inapt with words; even when ideas begin to come plentifully they too often remain vague, shapeless, ineffective for want of words to name them. And words

## COLLEGE SONS AND COLLEGE FATHERS

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can be taught;| not merely the words themselves, but their power, their suggestiveness, their rightness or wrongness for the meanings sought. The technique of writing has to do with sentences. Good thinking makes good sentences, but the sentence must be flexible if it is to ease the thought. We can learn its elasticity, we can practise the flow of clauses, until the wooden declaration that leaves half unexpressed gives place to a fluent and accurate transcript of the mind, form fitting substance as the vase the water within it. This technique has to do with paragraphs. The critic knows how few even among our professional writers master their paragraphs. It is not a dead, fixed form that is to be sought. It is rather a flexible development, which grows beneath the reader's eye until the thought is opened with vigor and with truth. It is interesting to search in the paragraph of an ineffective editorial or article or theme for the sentence that embodies the thought; to find it dropped like a turkey's egg where the first opportunity offers, or hidden by the rank growth of comment and reflection about it. Such research is illuminating for those who do

## WRITING ENGLISH

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not believe in the teaching of composition;—if it begins at home, so much the better. And, finally, the technique of writing has to do with the whole, whether sonnet or business letter or report to a board of directors. How to lead one thought into another; how to exclude the irrelevant; how to weigh upon that which is important; how to hold together the whole structure so that the subject, all the subject, and nothing but the subject, shall be laid before the reader: this requires good thinking, but good thinking without technical skill is like a strong arm in tennis without facility in the strokes.

The program I have outlined is simpler in theory than in practice. In practice, it is easier to discover the disorder than the thought that it confuses; in practice, technical skill must be forced upon undergraduates unaccustomed to thoroughness, in a country that in no department of life, except perhaps business, has hitherto been compelled to value technique. Even the optimist grows pessimistic sometimes in teaching composition.

And yet in the teaching of composition the results are perhaps more evident than elsewhere in

## COLLEGE SONS AND COLLEGE FATHERS

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the whole range of college work. It is wonderful to see what can be accomplished by an enthusiast in the sport of transmuting brain into words. When the teacher seeks for his material in the active interests of the student—whether athletics or engineering or literature or catching trout,—when he stimulates the finer interests, drawing off, as it were, the cream into words, the results are convincing. Writing is one of the most fascinating, most engaging of pursuits for the man with a craving to grasp the reality about him and name it in words. And even for the undergraduate, whose imagination is just developing, and whose brain protests against logical thought, it can be made as interesting as it is useful.

Although the teaching of English composition in this country is a vast industry in which thousands of workmen are employed, and in which a million or so young minds are invested, I do not wish to take it too seriously. There are many accomplishments more important for the welfare of the race. And yet, if it be true that maturity of intellect is never attained without that clearness and accuracy of thinking which can be made to show itself in good

## WRITING ENGLISH

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writing, then the failure of the undergraduate to write well is serious, and the struggle to make him write better, worthy of the attention of those who have children to be educated. I do not think that success in this struggle will come through the policy of *laissez-faire*. All undergraduates profit by organized help in their writing; many require it. I do not think that success will come by a pedantical insistence upon correctness in form without regard to the sense. Squeezing unwilling words from indifferent minds may be discipline; it certainly is not teaching. I think that success will come only to the teacher who is a middleman between thought and expression, valuing both. When we succeed in making the bulk of our undergraduates really think; when we can inspire them with a modicum of that passion for truth in words which is the moving force of the good writer; when the schools help us and the outside world demands and supports efficiency in diction — then we shall carry through the program of the Optimists.



## TEACHING ENGLISH

**T**HE so-called new professions have been given abundant space of late in the Sunday newspaper; but among them I do not find numbered the teaching of English. Nevertheless, with such exceptions as advertising, social service, and efficiency-engineering, it is one of the newest as well as one of the largest. I do not mean the teaching of English writing. Directly or indirectly that has been taught since the heavenly grace instructed Caedmon in his stable. I mean English literature, which has been made a subject of formal instruction in our schools and colleges only since the latter half of the nineteenth century. Yet already the colleges complain that the popularity of this comparatively recent addition to the curriculum is so great that harder, colder, more disciplinary subjects are pushed to the wall (and this in practical America!); and in the schools only the so-called vocational courses

## TEACHING ENGLISH

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are as much talked about and argued over by the educational powers. An army of men and women are teaching or trying to teach us English—which includes American—literature.

The results of this new profession—as even those who earn their bread thereby are willing to confess—are sometimes humorous. The comicality of scholarship—as when the sweaty hack-work of some hanger-on of the great Elizabethans is subjected to elaborate study and published in two volumes—belongs rather to the satire of research than to teaching. But there are many ludicrous sequels to the compulsory study of literature. Poor Hawthorne, shyest and rarest of spirit among our men of letters, becomes a text-book for the million. Dick Steele, who dashed off his cheerful trifles between sprees, is raised to a dreary immortality of comparison with the style and humor of Addison; their reputations—like a new torture in the Inferno—seesawing with the changing opinions of critics who edit “The Spectator” for the schools. And Shakespeare, who shares the weaknesses of all mortal workmen, is made a literary god (since this new profession must have its divinity), before whom all tastes bow

## COLLEGE SONS AND COLLEGE FATHERS

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down. Then in our classes we proceed to paraphrase, to annotate, to question and cross-question the books these great men have left behind them, until their tortured spirits must envy the current unpopularity of Latin and Greek. , As one of my undergraduates wrote at the end of an examination:

Shakespeare, this prosy paper makes me blush;  
Your finest fancies we have turned to—mush!

Nevertheless, it is the dilettante, the connoisseur, and the esthete who sneer at the results of teaching English. The practical man will not usually be scornful, even when he is unsympathetic; and the wise many, who know that power over good books is better than a legacy, are too thankful for benefits received to judge a profession by its failures. In truth, the finer minds, the richer lives that must be made possible if our democracy is not to become a welter of vulgar commercialism, are best composted by literature. And therefore the teacher of English, provided he can really teach, has a just claim upon the attention of every American parent. But what is teaching literature?

## TEACHING ENGLISH

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There is a function borrowed from Germany for our graduate schools, in which a group of professors have at their mercy for an hour of oral examination a much-to-be-pitied candidate for the degree of doctor of philosophy. They may ask him any question in their field that appears on previous reflection to be sufficiently difficult; and as the more one knows the more difficulty a given subject presents, and they are specialists, the ordeal is infernal. If I were brought before a like tribunal, composed of parents of our undergraduates, and asked to justify this new profession, I should probably begin by asserting that the purpose of teaching English is to give light for the mind and solace for the heart.

The function of the teacher of English as a shedder of light is perhaps more familiar to himself than to the world; but it assuredly exists and has even been forced upon him. The teacher of pure science utterly repudiates the notion that *he* is to shed light upon the meaning of life. His business is to teach the observed processes of Nature, and he is too busy exploding old theories of how she works, and creating new ones, to concern himself with the spiritual wel-

## COLLEGE SONS AND COLLEGE FATHERS

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fare of this generation. Perhaps it is just as well. As for the philosophers, in spite of the efforts of William James they have not yet consented to elucidate their subject for the benefit of the democracy;—with this result, that the average undergraduate learns the little philosophy that is taught him, in his class in English literature. Indeed, as if by a conspiracy in a practical world anxious to save time for the study of facts, not only the attributes of culture, but even ethics, morality, and the implications of science are left to the English department.

The burden is heavy. The temptation to throw it off, or to make use of the opportunity for a course in things-in-general and an easy reputation, is great. And yet all the world of thought does form a part of a course in English, for all that has matured in human experience finds its way into literature. And since good books are the emanations of radiant minds, the teacher of English must in the long run teach light.

But even if literature did not mean light for the mind, it would still be worth while to try to teach it, if only to prepare that solace for

## TEACHING ENGLISH

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the weary soul in reading which the most active must some day crave. The undergraduate puts on a solemn face when told that he may need the stimulus of books as an incentive to life, or the relaxation of books as a relief from it; but he remains inwardly unimpressed. And yet one does not have to be a philosopher to know that in this age of hurry and strain and sudden depressions the power to fall back on other minds and other times is above price. Therefore we teach literature in the hope that to the poets and the essayists, the playwrights and the novelists, men may be helped to bring slack or weary minds for cure.

All essays upon literature discourse upon the light and sweetness that flow from it. But this is not an essay upon literature; and that is why I have dismissed these hoped-for results so summarily, although profoundly believing that they are the ultimate purpose—indeed, the *raison d'être*—of teaching English. My business is rather with the immediate aim of these English courses to which we are sending our sons and daughters by the tens of thousands. I wish to discuss frankly, not so much the why, as the how, of teaching English.

## COLLEGE SONS AND COLLEGE FATHERS

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Fine words cannot accomplish it. When I first began to teach I met my Freshman classes with rich and glowing words—which I have repeated with more sobriety in the preceding paragraphs. Literature, I said, is the criticism of life; it is the spur of the noble mind and the comfort of the depressed. My ardent descriptions fell flat. They were too true; the Freshmen had heard them before. Now I begin bluntly with the assertion that the average young American does not know how to read; and proceed to prove it. To read out the meaning of a book; to interpret literature as it in turn interprets life—whatever may be our ultimate purpose, that I take to be the most immediate aim of teaching English.

I do not intend to slight the knowledge to be gained. Facts are well worth picking up on the way, but unless they are used they remain just facts—and usually forgotten ones. Where are your college note-books, crammed with the facts of English lectures? How much does the graduate remember of dates of editions, of “tendencies,” and “sources”? What can he say (as the examination paper has it) of Vaughan, of Cynewulf, of the Gothic novel,

## TEACHING ENGLISH

---

and of pantisocracy? Something, somewhere, I hope, for if the onward sweep of English literature is not familiar to him, if the great writers have no local habitation and a name, and Milton must be read in terms of twentieth-century England, and Poe as if he wrote for a Sunday newspaper syndicate, his English courses were dismally unsuccessful. And yet to have heard of Beowulf and Tess of the D'Urbervilles and Fair Rosamond is not to know English literature.

The undergraduate (and his parent) must be able to read literature in order to know it, and to read he must have the power of interpretation. It is easy to read the story in the Sunday supplement, where thoughts of one syllable are clothed in obvious symbols supposed to represent life. It is harder to read contemporary writing that contains real thought and real observation, for the mind and the imagination have to be stretched a little to take in the text. It is still more difficult to enjoy with due comprehension the vast treasure of our inherited literature, which must always outweigh in value our current gains. There the boy you send us to teach



## COLLEGE SONS AND COLLEGE FATHERS

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will be perplexed by the peculiarities of language, set astray by his lack of background, and confused by the operations of a time-spirit radically different from his own. A few trivialities of diction or reference may hide from him the life that some great genius has kept burning in the printed page. And even if the unfamiliar and the unexplained do not discourage him, even if he reads Shakespeare or Milton or Gray with his ardor unchilled, nevertheless, if he does not interpret, he gets but half. Here is the chief need for teaching English.

Hotspur, for example, in the first part of Shakespeare's "Henry IV.," bursts into enthusiastic speech:

By Heaven, methinks it were an easy leap,  
To pluck bright honor from the pale-faced moon,  
Or dive into the bottom of the deep,  
Where fathom-line could never touch the ground,  
And pluck up drowned honor by the locks.

Can the Freshman read it? Not unless he knows what "honor" meant for Hotspur and for Shakespeare. Not unless he comprehends the ardent exuberance of the Renaissance that inspires the extravagance of the verse.

## TEACHING ENGLISH

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Or Milton's famous portrait of Satan:

Darkened so, yet shone  
Above them all the Archangel: but his face  
Deep scars of thunder had intrenched, and care  
Sat on his faded cheek, but under brows  
Of dauntless courage and considerate pride,  
Waiting revenge.

Do you see him? Not unless, like Milton, you remember Jove and his lightnings, not unless the austere imagery of the Old Testament is present in your imagination; not unless "considerate" means more to you than an accent in the verse. In truth, the undergraduate cannot read Stevenson's "Markheim," Tennyson's "Lotos-Eaters," Kipling's "Recessional," or an essay by Emerson—to gather scattered instances—without background, without an interpretative insight, and without an exact understanding of the thought behind the words. Without them he must be content, at best, with a fifty-per-cent. efficiency of comprehension. And fifty per cent. is below the margin of enjoyment and below the point where real profit begins.

But even fifty per cent. is a higher figure than some undergraduates attain at the beginning

## COLLEGE SONS AND COLLEGE FATHERS

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of their college careers. Old Justice Shallow, for instance, pompous, boastful, tedious—Justice Shallow with his ridiculous attempts to prove himself as wicked as Falstaff, and his empty sententiousness, is certainly as well defined a comic character as Shakespeare presents, and yet it is astonishing how much of him is missed by the reader who cannot yet interpret.

“Justice Shallow,” writes a Freshman, “seems to be a jolly old man who loves company and who would do anything to please his guests.” “Justice Shallow,” says another, “was an easy-going man; that is, he did not allow things to worry him. At times he was very mean.” “Justice Shallow,” a third proposes, “is kind-hearted. . . . He means well, but things do not come out as he had planned them.”

Shallow jolly! Shallow kind-hearted! Perhaps occasionally,—for the benefit of gentlemen from the court. But to describe him thus is as if one should define an elephant as an animal with four legs and a fondness for hay. They missed the flavor of Shallow, these boys, not because it was elusive, but because they had not learned to read.

## TEACHING ENGLISH

---

All good books, whether new or old, present such difficulties of interpretation—difficulties often small in themselves but great when they prevent that instant flush of appreciation which literature demands. And therefore, if one cannot read lightly, easily, intelligently—why, the storehouse is locked; the golden books may be purchased and perused, but they will be little better than so much paper and print. Two-thirds of an English course must be learning to search out the meaning of the written word; must be just learning how to read.

This is the English teacher's program. Does he carry it out? In truth, it is depressing to sit in a recitation-room, estimating, while some one recites and your voice is resting, the volume and the flow of the streams of literary instruction washing over the undergraduates; and then to see them bob up to the surface at the end of the hour, seemingly as impervious as when their heads went under. We teachers of English propose, as I have said above, to ennoble the mind by showing it how to feed upon the thoughts of the great, to save the state by sweetness and light; while

## COLLEGE SONS AND COLLEGE FATHERS

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our students sell their Miltons and Tennysons to the second-hand bookstore, and buy the machine-made, please-the-million magazines! The pessimist will assert that there is a screw out somewhere in our intellectual platform.

Not out, but loose. My picture of the undergraduate, like Hamlet's picture of Claudius, is a likeness, but not a faithful portrait. The college English course certainly carries with it no guarantee of solid literary taste, no certainty that the average bachelor of arts will take a stand against the current cheapening of literature. He may have a row of leather-bound pocket Shakespeares in the living-room bookcase, but that is sometimes the only outward evidence of his baptism into the kingdom of English books. Further than that you cannot be sure of what teaching English has done for him. But neither can you be certain that this is all it has done for him. The evidence of his parents is not always to be trusted, for the undergraduate feels that grown-up America does not approve of bookishness, and so, if he has any literary culture, keeps it to himself. Men of letters, editorial writers, and other professional critics of our intellectual accom-

## TEACHING ENGLISH

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plishments are not good judges, for they are inclined to apply to a recent graduate the standards of an elegant and allusive brand of culture which is certainly not American, though in its way admirable enough. I am doubtful myself, but this much my experience has taught me, that, disappointing as the apparent results of teaching English may be, the actual results are far more considerable than pessimists suppose—as great, perhaps, as we can expect.

The mind of the undergraduate is like a slab of coarse-grained wood upon which the cabinet-maker lavishes his stain. Its empty pores soak in the polishing mixture, no matter how richly it may be applied, and in many instances we fail to get the expected gloss. Much English teaching, in fact, is (to change the figure) subterranean in its effects. You may remember no Tennyson, and yet have gained a sensitiveness to moral beauty and an ear for the glory of words. Your Shakespeare may have gathered dust for a decade, and yet still be quickening your sympathy with human nature. That glow in the presence of a soaring pine or towering mountain; that warmth of the imagination as some modern struggle

## COLLEGE SONS AND COLLEGE FATHERS

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recalls an ancient protagonist; the feeling that life is always interesting somehow, somewhere—how much of this is due to Wordsworth, Shelley, Stevenson, Browning, or Keats, dim in the memory, perhaps, but potent in the subconsciousness, no one can ever determine. The psychologist will answer, much. The layman must consider the spring, the recuperative power, the quantity and quality of happiness among the well-read in comparison with the unread, for his reply. The results of my own observation enable me to view even the debris of lectures and study in a “flunker’s” examination paper with dejection, to be sure, but not with despair. The undergraduate, I admit sorrowfully, is usually superficial in his reading, and sometimes merely barbarous in the use he makes of it; but there is more gained from his training in literature than meets the sight.

Thus the effects of English teaching are sometimes hidden. But English teachers are so common nowadays that of them every one may form his own opinion. And, indeed, the rain of criticism falls upon just and unjust alike.

The undergraduate, if he takes the trouble

## TEACHING ENGLISH

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to classify his teachers of English otherwise than as "hard" or "easy," would probably divide the species into two types: the highly polished variety with somewhat erratic clothes and an artistic temperament, and the cold scholar who moves in a world of sources, editions, and dates. I would be content with this classification, superficial as it is, were it not that the parent of the undergraduate, who is footing the bills, has made no classification at all, and deserves, if he wants it, a more accurate description of the profession he is patronizing. English teachers, I may say to him, are of at least four different kinds. For convenience I shall name them the gossips, the inspirationists, the scientists, and the middle-of-the-road men whose ambition it is to teach neither anecdote, nor things in general, nor mere facts, but literature.

The literary gossip is the most engaging, and not the least useful of them all. As the horse's hoofs beat "propuppy, propuppy, propuppy" for Tennyson's greedy farmer, so "personality" rings for ever in his brain, and constantly mingles in his speech. "The man behind the book," is his worthy motto; and his lectures



## COLLEGE SONS AND COLLEGE FATHERS

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are stuffed with biographical anecdote until the good stories spill over. No humorous weakness of the Olympians is left without its zest, and the student learns more of Carlyle's indigestion, Coleridge's absent-mindedness, or the deformity of Pope, than of their immortal works.

The literary gossip is an artist. He can raise dead authors to life, and give students of little imagination an interest in the books of the past which they never would have gained from mere printed texts. But he has the faults of the artistic temperament. He will sacrifice everything in order to impress his hearers. Hence he is never dull; and when he combines his skill in anecdote with real literary criticism, he becomes a teacher of such power that college presidents compete for his services. But when his talents do not rise above the ordinary, his courses are better designated vaudeville than the teaching of English. As the old song has it, when he is good he is very, very good, for he plows up the unresponsive mind so that appreciation may grow there. But when he is bad, he is horrid.

The inspirationists held the whole field of

## TEACHING ENGLISH

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English teaching until the scientists attacked them in the rear, found their ammunition-wagons lacking in facts, and put them upon their defense. The inspirationist was—no is, for he has been sobered but not routed by the onslaughts of German methodologies—a fighter in the cause of “uplift” in America. In 1814 he would have been a minister of the gospel or an apostle of political freedom. In 1914 he uses Shakespeare, Milton, the novelists, the essayists, indifferently to preach ideas—moral, political, esthetic, philosophical, scientific—to his undergraduates. At the club table after hours he orates at imaginary Freshmen. “Make ’em think!” he shouts. “Make ’em feel! Give them ideas—and their literary training will take care of itself!” And the course he offers is like those famous medieval ones, where the whole duty of man, here and hereafter, was to be obtained from a single professor. Indeed, since the field of teaching began to be recruited from predestined pastors who found the pulpit too narrow for their activities, it is simply astonishing how much ethics, spirituality, and inspiration generally has been freed in the class-room. Ask the undergraduates.

## COLLEGE SONS AND COLLEGE FATHERS

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I mean no flippancy. I thoroughly believe that it is far more important to teach literature than the facts about literature. And all these things are among the ingredients of literature. I am merely pointing out the extremes of extra-literary endeavor into which the remoteness of the philosophers, the slackening of religious training in the home, and the absence of esthetic influences in American life have driven some among us. A friend of mine begins his course in Carlyle with a lecture on the unreality of matter, Browning with a discussion of the immortality of the soul, and Ruskin with an exhibition of pictures. He is responding to the needs of the age. Like most of the inspirationists, he does not fail to teach something; like many of them, he has little time left for literature.

The day does not differ from the night more sharply than the scientist in teaching English does from the inspirationist. The literary scientist sprang into being when the scientific activity of the nineteenth century reached esthetics and began to lay bare our inaccuracies and our ignorance. Chaucer, Spenser, Jonson, Defoe—we knew all too little about their lives,

## TEACHING ENGLISH

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and of what we knew a disgraceful part was wrong. Our knowledge of the writers of the Anglo-Saxon period, and of the thirteenth and fifteenth centuries, of the minor Elizabethan dramatists and the lyricists of the seventeenth century, consisted chiefly of ill-assorted facts or unproved generalizations. Our catalogue of errors was a long one. The response to this crying need for scholarship, for science, was slow—but when it came, it came with a rush. Nowadays, the great majority of university teachers of English are specialists in some form of literary research.

As far as the teacher is concerned, the result has doubtless been good. There have been broader backgrounds, more accuracy in statement, less “bluffing”—in a word, more thoroughness; and the out-and-out scientists have set a pace in this respect that other teachers of English have had to follow. But, curiously enough, while the teacher of English, and especially the professed scientist, has become more thorough, the students are said to be less so. How to account for so distressing a phenomenon!

The truth seems to be that science in English literature has become so minute in its investiga-

## COLLEGE SONS AND COLLEGE FATHERS

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tion of details, so scrupulous in the accuracy of even the most trivial statement, that the teacher who specializes in this direction despairs of dragging his classes after him. Scholarship for this scientist has become esoteric. Neither the big world outside nor his little world of the class-room can comprehend his passion for date and source and text; and, like the Mormon who keeps his wives at home, he has come to practise his faith without imposing it upon others. The situation is not entirely unfortunate. Until scientific scholarship has ended its mad scurryings for the unconsidered trifles still left uninvestigated, and begun upon the broader problems of criticism and of teaching that will remain when all the dates are gathered and all the sources hunted home, it is questionable whether it has anything but facts to contribute to the elementary teaching of English.

At present the scientist's best position is in the upper branches of a college education. There he is doing good work—except when an emotional, sensitive Junior or Senior, eager to be thrilled by literature, and to understand it, is provided with nothing but “scientific”

## TEACHING ENGLISH

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courses. For studying about literature—and this is the scientist's program—can in no possible sense be regarded as a satisfactory alternative to studying the thing itself, no matter how great may be its auxiliary value. And many a recent graduate of many a college who reads these lines will recognize his own plight in that of the youth who, finding only gossips who amused him, inspirationists who sermoned him, and scientists who reduced glowing poetry to a skeleton of fact, decided that, in spite of the catalogue, literature itself was not taught in his university.

What *is* teaching literature? But I have already answered that question according to my own beliefs, in the earlier part of this essay. It must be—at least for the undergraduate—instruction in the interpretation of literature; it must be teaching how to read. For if the boy is once taught how to turn the key, only such forces of heredity and environment as no teaching will utterly overcome can prevent him from entering the door. It is this that all wise teachers of English realize; it is this that the middle-of-the-road men try to put in practice. I give them this title because

## COLLEGE SONS AND COLLEGE FATHERS

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they do keep to the middle of the literary road—because they understand that the teacher of English should avoid the extremes I have depicted in the preceding paragraphs, without despising them. He should master his facts as the scientist does, because it is too late in the day to impose unverified facts or shaky generalizations even upon hearers as uncritical as the usual run of undergraduates. He should try to inspire his classes with the ideas and emotions of the text, for to teach the form of a book and neglect its contents is as if your grocer should send you an empty barrel. He should not neglect the life and color that literary biography brings into his field. And yet the aim of the right kind of instructor is no one of these things. He uses them all, but merely as steps in the attempt to teach his students how to read.

This it is to follow the golden mean and make it actually golden in our profession. And indeed, when one considers that throughout America there are hundreds of thousands calling themselves educated who cannot read Shakespeare or the Bible, or even a good magazine, with justice to the text; when one considers

## **TEACHING ENGLISH**

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the treasures of literature, new as well as old, waiting to be used for the increase of happiness, intelligence, and power, what else can be called teaching English?

**THE END**















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